BE THE BEST! 12 PAGES OF BASS LESSONS FROM WORLD-CLASS TUTORS **INSIDE!**

STEVE LAWSON · PHIL MANN · STUART CLAYTON

THE **UK'S NUMBER ONE** BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

Bass Guitar Magazine

GEDDY LEE
"When it comes to bass I'm a crazy, obsessive nerd!"

THUNDER'S CHRIS CHILDS MEETS STONE SOUR'S JOHNY CHOW

TWO BASS GREATS. ONE GREAT INTERVIEW

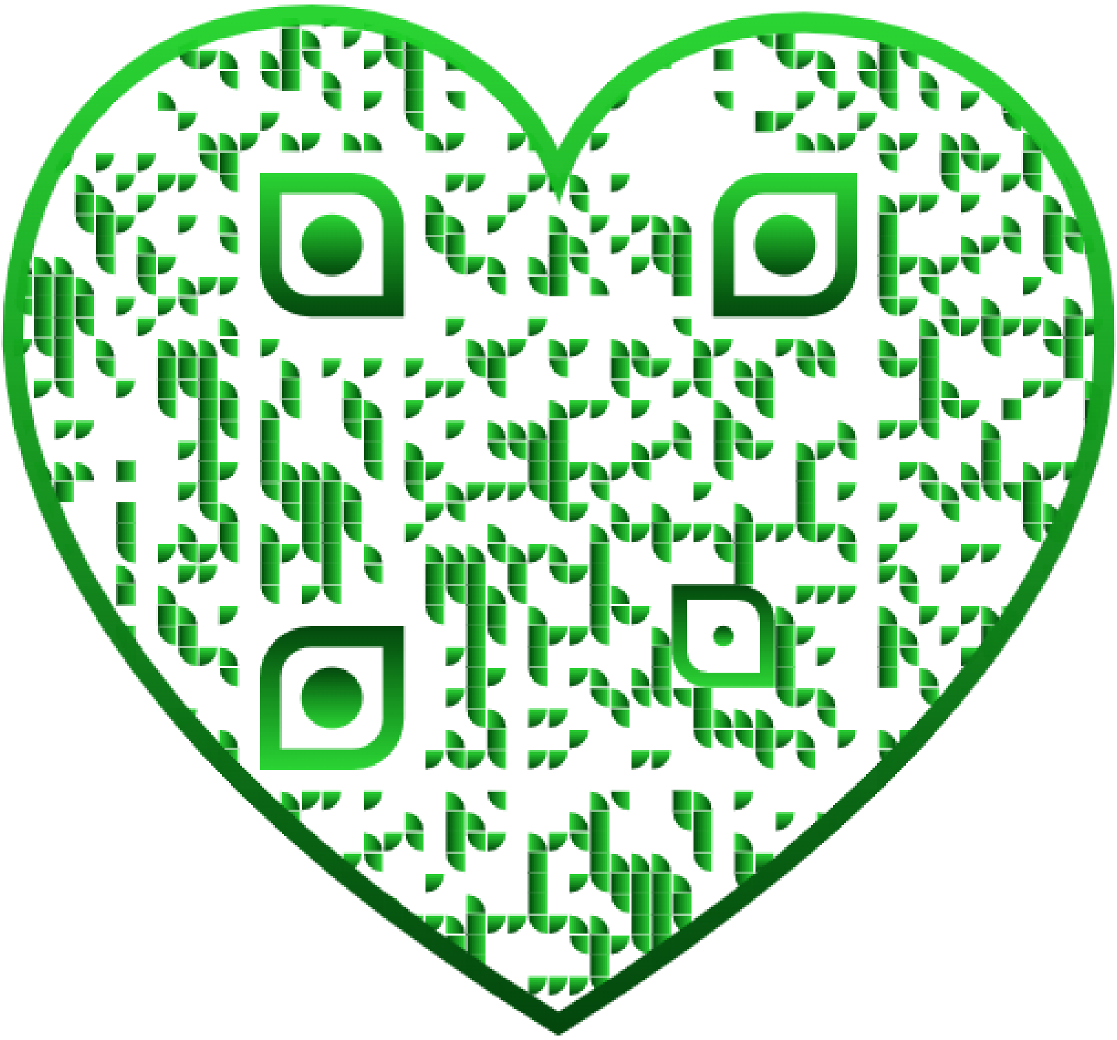
BILLY SHEEHAN
"Get in a band and get to work!"

+

SNOW OWL
JOE SAM
JENNY LEE
WOJTEK PILICHOWSKI

REVIEWED
ESSENTIAL NEW BASS GEAR
Aria, Seymour Duncan, Phil Jones Bass & more!

FUTURE



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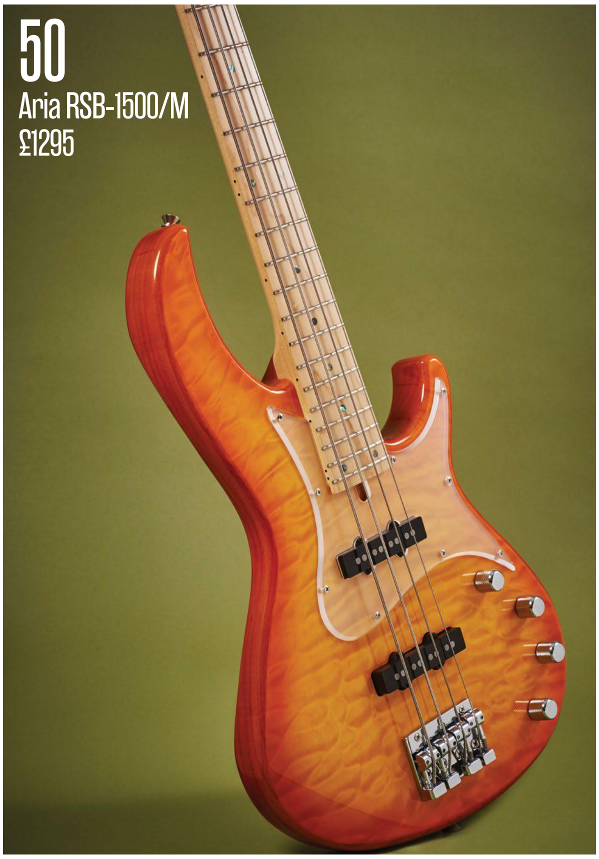
One of the perks of working on this magazine is the variety of musicians that we get to meet. Soul, jazz, blues, rock, R&B, funk, reggae and metal bassists – as well as those who defy categorisation – it's a privilege to spend time with all of them. Our only problem is that we could profitably fill a magazine a month with hundreds of talented bassists and still not cover all the ground we'd like to. That's why we've got two bass players rather than one on our cover this month. Johny Chow of Stone Sour and Chris Childs of Thunder, worthy representatives of two generations of rock bass, come together in a monster bass summit.

Flip the pages and you'll find we've also spent quality time with the Colombian genius Snow Owl, original Alice Cooper Band bassist Dennis Dunaway and the slapping sensation Wojtek Pilichowski. Elsewhere we explore the frontiers of sound with Son Of Sam bassist Joe Sam, Jenny Lane of Rock Goddess and the Ohio bass duo Bridesmaid – and then there's the small matter of our sit-downs with two all-time stars, Geddy Lee and Billy Sheehan. Gear-wise, we review amazing products for all pockets, from a bass case costing £105 to a Lightwave bass that will set you back "only" £1350.

As always, our stated mission is to make you the best bass player you can be, and we're lucky to have world-class lessons from Stu Hamm, Steve Lawson, Phil Mann and Stu Clayton, as well as tips and advice from Nik Preston, Ruth Goller, Daniel Firth, Michael McKeegan and Dave Swift. These people know what they're talking about when it comes to bass... Enjoy!

Joel McIver, Editor



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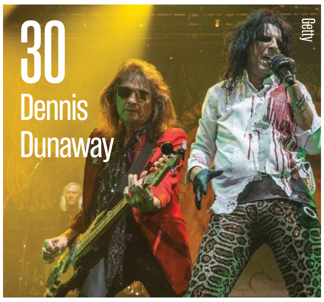

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News and views from the bass world, collated by *BGM*'s team of intrepid newshounds

HAMMPLIFIED

***BGM* and *BP* columnist, bassist supreme and** all-round hero in our world Stuart Hamm has announced his new signature amp from Markbass, available now. "Markbass has finally given me the sound that I have been looking for!" says our man. "The S.T.U. Amp 1000 has beautiful solid-state and tube sounds that can also be blended together to create the sound that I need, according to the musical situation. And the cabinet is a groundbreaking and lightweight 2x15 cab that has more clarity and punch than any 4x10 or 8x10 I've played."

http://www.markbass.it/product-detail/mb-stu-amp-1000/

Ecki

BLAME IT ON THE...

Mesa/Boogie has several new Subway bass amp variants: the WD-800 amp, Ultra-Lite 2x12, 2x15 vertical and 4x10 cabs, and the Subway+ Bass DI-Preamp. The WD-800 is like a powered-up version of Mesa's Walkabout bass head, pairing a tube preamp with Class D output, rotary shelving tone controls, semi-parametric EQ, a high-pass filter and power amp damping. The Ultra-Lite cabs are made from lightweight Italian poplar and come with Subway Neodymium speakers. The Subway+ DI-Preamp is based on the Subway D-800+ amp. It's got gain and level controls, tone shaping and two-band semi-parametric EQ, all in a compact DI box.

In other amp news, Peavey have launched the lightweight MAX bass amp series with an angled baffle to keep the low end omni-directional and the transient tones directional, so you can hear yourself clearly without having to tilt the amp back. The range includes 100, 150 and 250-watt models with the company's Kosmos-C bass enhancement for extra harmonics and sub-harmonics, clip-limiting speaker protection technology and an ultra-quiet DI output.

www.westsidedistribution.com
www.bandm.co.uk

BASSWATCH

Every month, keen bass-spotter Ray Walker brings us an online bargain

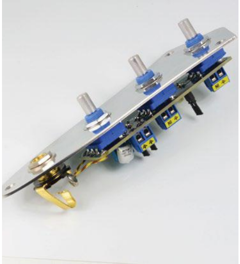
Skjold Slayer £1,350
https://tinyurl.com/y8dac34f

This month's eye-candy is a delectable Skjold Slayer five-string. The body of this monster boasts a single piece of primavera, with the deep-pocketed neck comprising purpleheart and maple for superb stability. Topping this off is a beautiful birdseye maple fingerboard. At its heart, the Slayer packs an East/Skjold two-band preamp with volume, pan and passive tone with push/pull active and passive modes. With the addition of Hipshot Ultralite tuners and A-style bridge, this incredibly versatile bass delivers tight, punchy tones ranging from crisp and aggressive to deep and fat. Just what you'd expect from a world-renowned custom builder.

PLATE POWER

Hardware manufacturers Tone Up have announced replacement control plate assemblies for Jazz-style bass guitars, featuring specially designed potentiometers with fine-tuning options for onboard treble-bleed and tone-depth circuits. No soldering is required, they tell us; the new control plate drops into your Jazz or Jazz clone and is available for basses with one or two sets of volume and tone pots. Nab one for between £63 and £78, and let us know your verdict.

www.tonetechluthiersupplies.co.uk



UNIVERSAL

Fender's Parallel Universe range was first announced at NAMM a year ago, focusing on basses that combine features from various models from the F stable. The final entry in the line-up is the '51 Telecaster PJ Bass, which as you might imagine features elements taken from Telecaster, Precision and Jazz models. There's a Telecaster maple neck with American Vintage '63 P-Bass profile, bolted to a slab ash '51 P Bass body; a Custom Shop '60s Jazz Bass single-coil bridge; '60s P-Bass split-coil middle pickups; a HiMass Vintage bridge; and old-school stacked concentric volume controls. Grab one for £1,609.

www.fender.com

SHOP TALK

A regular feature in which we meet a renowned bass-maker

THIS MONTH: Morten Ehlers, Bass Buddha

I was a pro bass player until I turned 30 and came to terms with the fact that I wasn't cut out to be a touring musician. I decided to get an education as an electronic technician – probably the best decision I ever made! It turned out that there was an internship available at TC Electronic in Aarhus, Denmark. At the time TC were building the first mockup of the RH450 amp head. After a couple of months I was assigned to the project, since I had experience as a bass player. The years passed and eventually I became the product manager of all bass-related products at TC, travelling to essential events such as Bass Player Live, the London Bass Guitar Show and the NAMM Show. Whenever I got the chance, I sneaked out of the TC booth to check out basses. A lot of the high-end brands weren't available in Scandinavia, so in 2016 I moved on from TC and opened my store, Bass Buddha, where I can bring many of them to the public.

Buddha means 'enlightened'; my mission is to sharpen bassists' knowledge so they can make better decisions about their instruments, and not just buy the one Jaco played! I'm very active on Facebook and YouTube, making product videos for those who can't come to Denmark to play my basses.

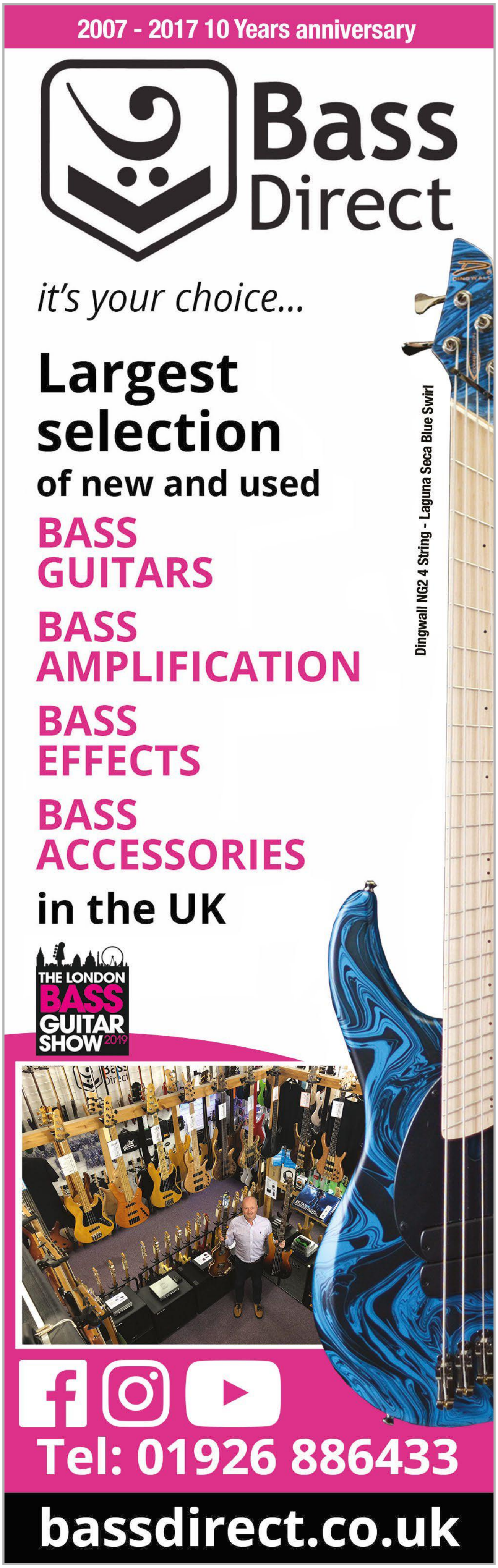
I want to run the best webshop for bass players worldwide. I focus on having a wide selection of high-end brands: Dingwall, Marleaux, Sandberg, Sadowsky, Overwater, Bergantino, Vanderkley, Aguilar, Eich and Darkglass, to name only a few. And I'll keep expanding. If you're in Europe, drop by!
www.bassbuddha.com

BROOKSY ON BASS

We've all been there; the knackered strap, the popped-out strap button, the whirlwind stage gymnastics that result in you heading one way and your bass going in the other. No-one tells you about straplocks when you start out, but a single accident is enough to put them at the top of your shopping list. Although they aren't a cast-iron guarantee that calamity won't strike, they will significantly reduce its likelihood. Straplocks come in an array of colours to match your hardware, from a long list of accessory manufacturers, and each style has its pros and cons – so shop around and find what works best for you. Some basses come fitted with the necessary hardware pre-installed, so check how your bass strap connects to your bass before filling your shopping basket.
Hot Tip: If times are tough, a pair of rubber washers from Grolsch bottles are a lifesaver!

AGUILAR ANGLES

We recently reviewed two killer products from Aguilar, the Tone Hammer 700 and the SL 212, and we would like to clarify that the US retail price for the Tone Hammer is $849 and the SL 212 is $1,199. In other Aguilar news, the company have recently announced their new Super Split bass pickups. Full review coming your way soon...



LOW LIFE

Welcome to our new live skills page, where Antonio Angotti, Tax The Heat bassist and tutor in Live Performance at BIMM in Birmingham, makes you the best live bassist you can be. Let's hit the stage!

Hello, fellow bassists, and welcome! We bass players are not commonly known for our stage presence. I appreciate that this statement is a sweeping generalisation – Flea, Victor Wooten, Robert Trujillo, Verdine White and Billy Sheehan are just some bassists who buck the trend. But there's some truth to the idea that bass performers aren't the most outgoing musicians, so what I want to focus on with this new page is how we can become more effective performers on stage.

The first question to consider is whether we're trying to find our own authentic way of performing, or whether we're simply aiming to be more visually in keeping with an existing band of musicians. You can extend this to include stylistic considerations for performance, and whether what we're doing on stage is appropriate for the genre. For example, windmilling your luscious locks during the most sensitive moment of an Adele ballad might not be an effective way of keeping a gig. Regardless of the situation, there are some basic concepts that we can experiment with in order to start working towards a more engaging visual performance.

Something that I start a lot of my students off with is a 'choreography' of sorts. Don't worry – this isn't the all-singing, all-dancing sort of choreography that you might expect from a production of *Cats*, say. Instead, we focus on your position on stage and align it to certain sections of the song being played. This sort of planning will result in a better visual dynamic, even though it's as simple as moving backwards and forwards.

As an example, a verse section is the perfect opportunity for you to move towards the back of the stage, or over to the drummer, where you can lock in together. Musically, verse sections tend to be a little more exposed or vocally focused than other song sections, so there is no need for us to be lunging over the monitor wedge or scaling the security barrier.

In contrast, when a chorus kicks in, moving to the front of the stage will mirror the build in intensity from the music. If several members of the band synchronise with these movements, it can really make a difference when it comes to creating an engaging overall performance. With this one simple tip, you can begin to beat the bassist stereotypes and avoid being rooted to the spot.

At BIMM Birmingham, we've been expanding on this concept with our degree-level bass students over the last term. They've been learning about the nuances of their visual performance, and how subtle elements such as facial expression or posture can communicate different messages to an audience. Our live shows are an ideal first opportunity for them to implement improvements to their stagecraft. Make sure to look out for the next gig – and come and support the next generation of performing musicians.

www.taxtheheat.com, www.bimm.co.uk

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BASS OF **TOMORROW**

Hungarian luthier Péter Gáspá of Blasius Guitars on his vision for the future

Interview: Hywel Davies

"I started making basses about 30 years ago. I'm a bass player myself, so I was always trying to find better instruments to play," explains Péter Gáspá when we ask about his past history of making bass guitars. "I wasn't satisfied with what I could find when I started playing bass. I made my first bass back in '82 and I started making holes in it, replacing pickups – and that's where it began for me."

Blasius consists of three luthiers – Balázs Mihály, Zoltán Mihályi and Gáspá. Mihály, who founded the company over 30 years ago, follows the philosophy that basses should be treated as acoustic instruments in their own right. To him and his colleagues, the resulting tonality resonates far more naturally, equating to a superior-sounding instrument.

So, what new developments have occurred at Blasius lately, we ask? "We have new electronics with active pickups, which gives much more clarity to the sound. We have new Jazz bass styles and the Precision styles, but we like the modern sound, which is why these models are made with fanned frets."

> "PEOPLE CAN COME IN EVERY WEEK TO SEE HOW IT'S GOING, EVEN RIGHT FROM THE START"

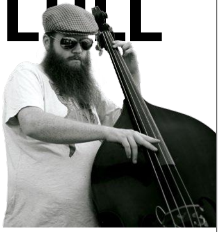
The philosophies of the finest luthiers have one thing in common, which is that locally sourced materials make for better instruments. Blasius follow this thinking, but also use modern materials to enhance their basses. "Most of the time we use the types of wood that grow in Hungary," says Gáspá. "We try to protect the environment as well, so we don't use all these exotic woods. We try to use as many of our local woods as possible, but the other thing we've started to use is carbon fibre in our instruments. It's not just inside the wood – it's laminated between the woods, so there's a lot more stiffness to the neck."

Blasius have an open-door policy for their clients, making sure their basses can perfectly fit the needs of any given artist. "If someone comes to us with an idea of the sound and character that they want from a bass, then we can design the bass just for them. The shape, the materials, the electronics – these are all made specifically for that person. People can come in every week to see how it's going, even right from the start when we collect the woods. They can be there when we choose the electronics and all the other parts. Our artists are a big part of the whole process of making our basses."

www.blasiusguitars.com

NO TREBLE

Kevin Johnson updates us from the low end



The No Treble community mourned this month as the world lost another giant of the bass: Joe Osborn, who played on countless hits from the 60s and beyond, died of pancreatic cancer at 81 years old.

Osborn was a native of Louisiana, where he spent his final days, but is best known for his studio work in Los Angeles, California. His first major hit came in 1961 with Ricky Nelson's 'Travelin' Man', which he had found as a demo and suggested to Nelson. After the band dissolved Osborn was able to do more freelance work. He quickly became a first-call musician alongside others like drummer Hal Blaine and keyboardist Larry Knechtel. The same handful of players, who recorded nearly every hit of the 60s and early 70s, would later be known as the Wrecking Crew.

Osborn recorded on an amazing number of hits including 'Memphis' by Johnny Rivers, 'California Dreamin'' by the Mamas & The Papas, 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' by Simon & Garfunkel and many more. He also helped to discover the Carpenters and recorded on all of their albums. He would leave Los Angeles in 1974 for Nashville, where he continued his tradition of making hit songs in the country music scene.

Osborn eventually moved back to Louisiana and lived in semi-retirement while fostering up-and-coming musicians. During a 2012 interview in No Treble's 'Stories Behind the Songs' column, he offered a piece of advice for bassists. 'Young players ask me, 'How do you think of all those things to play?' And this is one of my lessons that I repeat over and over again: the song will tell you what to play if you listen. You get your ideas from either the melody or the vocal phrasing gives you rhythmic ideas.'

Joe's bass-lines are still played constantly on the radio to this day, and if you've ever been in a cover band, you've likely been copying his work. Our thoughts are with his family and friends.

In other news this month, Ryan Madora examined what makes Nirvana's Krist Novoselic so great in her 'Bass Players To Know' column, Mitch Joel had a great chat with YYNOT's Tim Starace on the Groove podcast, and readers ogled over the new Fender American Performer Series. Until next time, keep grooving!

www.notreble.com

BASSCHAT

Impostor syndrome analysed by Silvia Bluejay

Judging by a recent discussion on our forum, some of us are a tad insecure about our musical ability. Yes, Basschat has been exploring impostor syndrome. While few of us know singers or lead guitarists who suffer from it, it seems to strike a chord (pardon the pun) with bassists.

Many of us have felt, at some point, as if we've ended up in a band, or in a pit, or on stage, out of sheer luck. We feel like we're bluffing, that we haven't earned our spot thanks to our talent and our years of practice and preparation. On some occasions the feeling is made worse by other musicians' cliquey attitude, or by our awareness of their superior talent or experience. However, other than in our own minds, there is absolutely no reason for us to feel like impostors; the accounts posted on the thread relate that, far from finding any fault in our performance, our bandmates and the audience almost invariably enjoy it. In any group of musicians, there will always be someone who's 'better' than us – rather than feeling intimidated, we should learn as much as possible from playing with them, and concentrate on having fun.

So why do we suffer from this syndrome? Is it because, as part of the rhythm section 'at the back', we tend to focus more on technique than on attitude, becoming our own harshest critics? Or because we are painfully aware that, most of the time, only other musicians will notice what we play, while the average punter doesn't even realise there's a bassist in the band? Is it just because we still can't believe we're being paid to do something we love? Some of us point out that you can feel like an impostor when you sit down, on your own, to work out the bass-line to a new song, and spectacularly fail to unlock it.

Time to quit bass-playing and take up knitting? Not so fast. Suddenly, as if by magic, the correct notes unleash themselves, hitting your fingers and your ears like a wave. Perhaps you *are* a musician after all… There seems to be no escaping the syndrome, but sometimes it's not us who should suffer from it. Your band can be absolutely on fire, its chemistry immense, its performance raising the roof, and yet provoke no reaction. The audience takes no notice. They keep talking to their friends. No, you're not at fault. In these cases, it's the audience who's the impostor.

www.basschat.co.uk

TALKBASS

Bryan R Tyler takes time to appreciate the bass itself

Bass – it's the tool you use to articulate your musical voice. But does your bass say something about you? The range of customisation available is immense, maybe even surpassing guitar, and bassists can get downright obsessive over getting their instruments exactly how they like them.

When I started playing, I loved getting new issues of *Bass Player* magazine and checking out the ads for the custom builders. Six-string basses, headless basses, crazy body shapes – there were so many different styles and options I had never seen in local stores. As I became more familiar with bass virtuosos, I noticed their instrument choice was often synonymous with the player. Marcus Miller's heavily modded 77 Jazz, Anthony Jackson's Fodera contrabass, Stanley Clarke's short-scale Alembics – basses so wildly different, but chosen by each player as their vehicle of expression.

It turns out that most of us love the instrument itself, and we love refining it to fit our playing style and create the sound we're after. It's always fun seeing people's bass collections on TalkBass and how much they vary. Do you have a tried-and-true passive P-Bass that you stick with, no matter what? Do you keep an arsenal of widely different basses so you can cover anything that might come your way? Maybe you prefer a bass with a dozen different knobs and switches to give you a wide tonal palette without having to change instruments… I personally like to keep a fretted and a fretless Elrick, with the only modification being a ramp, so my collection is small and doesn't change for years at a time, meaning I really get the chance to connect with it. On the opposite side, some TalkBass members love scouring Craigslist and pawnshops for inexpensive basses, then modding them out with new hardware and electronics, giving them a wide array of solid instruments for only a small amount of money.

Basses, and the modifications we can make to them, are as diverse as the music we use them to play. Some view their basses simply as tools. That's fine, but there's no shame in loving your tools either – there's joy to be found in the bass itself.

www.talkbass.com

THEORY OF THE MONTH

TRINITY COLLEGE LONDON

Overwater BASSES

Half whole diminished scales are a piece of cake thanks to Nik Preston

This month's study is designed to help us get inside the sound of the half whole (HW) diminished scale over dominant chords, while using a very simple motif. Don't be alarmed, this is an awful lot simpler to play than the notation opposite might make you believe!

We often use intervallic exercises to help familiarise ourselves with new scales or modes. As usual for these situations, it's really worthwhile to practise all of the intervals that occur within the scale we're working on. Due to the octatonic (eight-note) construction of the diminished scale, we have one more interval to practise than we would were we working with conventional seven-note, Major and minor scale harmony.

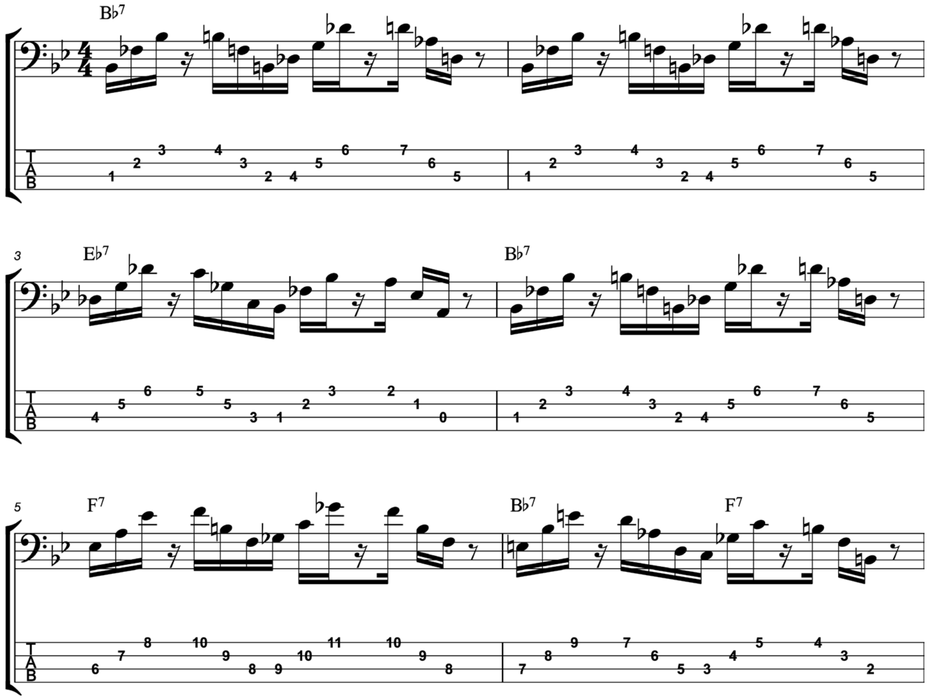
The first example features a motif predominantly comprised of tritones (steps of three whole tones), but it could have equally been any interval found within the scale. The chord sequence is essentially a short form (or double time feel) blues in the key of B flat; throughout the study we are using the HW scale built on the root of the relevant chord – Bb, Eb or F (or I, IV, V in the key of Bb).

Due to the symmetry inherent in diminished scales, there are actually only three such scales in western harmony in terms of pitch. For example, our Bb HW scale comprises exactly the same pitches as the Db, E and G HW scales. Eb is the same as Gb, while A, C and F are the same as Ab, B and D. In short, by using a study of allowable diminished scales over a blues, we have managed to practise every diminished scale there is. Handy, eh?

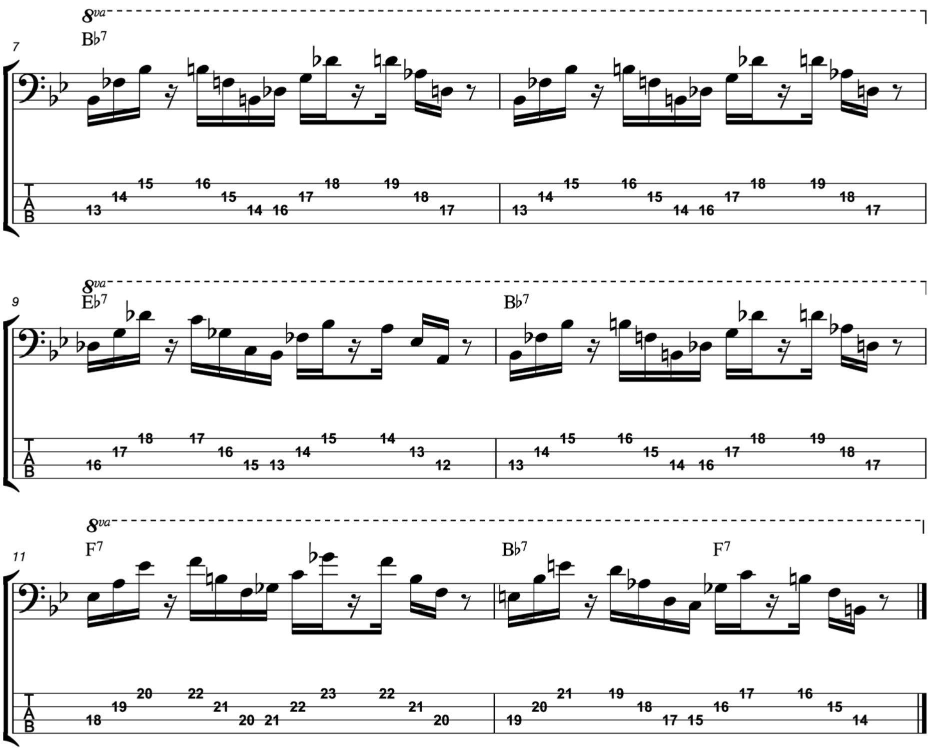
This study also conveniently doubles as a useful string-crossing exercise; you'll note that Example 2 is exactly the same as Example 1, except that it's been transposed up an octave. You'll need a bass with 23 frets to play it in this key, but it's there for reference (and maybe hardcore sightreading practice!) regardless of the range of your specific instrument.

This study is designed to help us become more familiar with the fretboard, build our knowledge of diminished harmony and improve our listening skills. As with all studies, the final goal is to develop our skills to the point where we feel confident to then go on and create. Practise it at a speed that lets you think about the intervals you are playing – not necessarily as fast as you can physically perform it. At least at first…!

Example 1



Example 2



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18494 - Fender Am Performer Mustang Bass, White
18496 - Fender Am Performer Mustang Bass, Aub.
18495 - Fender Am Performer Mustang Bass, S.Green
18485 - Fender Am. Performer P. Bass Sunburst
18486 - Fender Am. Performer P. Bass A.White
18488 - Fender Am. Performer P. Bass Penny
18487 - Fender Am. Performer P. Bass LP Blue
18246 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass, Sunburst
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12188 - Hofner Ignition Violin Bass, Sunburst
18369 - Ibanez SR300 4-String Bass, Purple, Used
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18208 - Italia Torino Bass, Trans Blue, Used
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10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
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TECHNIQUE OF THE MONTH

Ecki

The great Stu Hamm returns with the second instalment of his essential techniques column. No matter what kind of music you play, or the level at which you play, you need to read this

Welcome, fearless readers and fellow bassists, to the second edition of Technique Of The Month! I hope that you've been practising last month's lesson on open-note bends, and that you've developed the strength in your fingers – no easy feat, I know – you'll need to pull off that technique seamlessly, because we're going to use that technique as a starting point for this month's lesson.

Let's explore other ways in which we can use this basic technique to play some tasty fills that help establish the tonality of the key we're in. In our last issue, we bent the F# on the fourth fret of the D string up to a G, while at the same time popping the open G string with the middle finger of our right hand, and letting the open G ring while we bent the D string up until the two strings were playing the same note. This created tension and a pleasing resolution when the two pitches finally matched.

> "WE CAN USE THIS BASIC TECHNIQUE TO PLAY SOME TASTY FILLS"

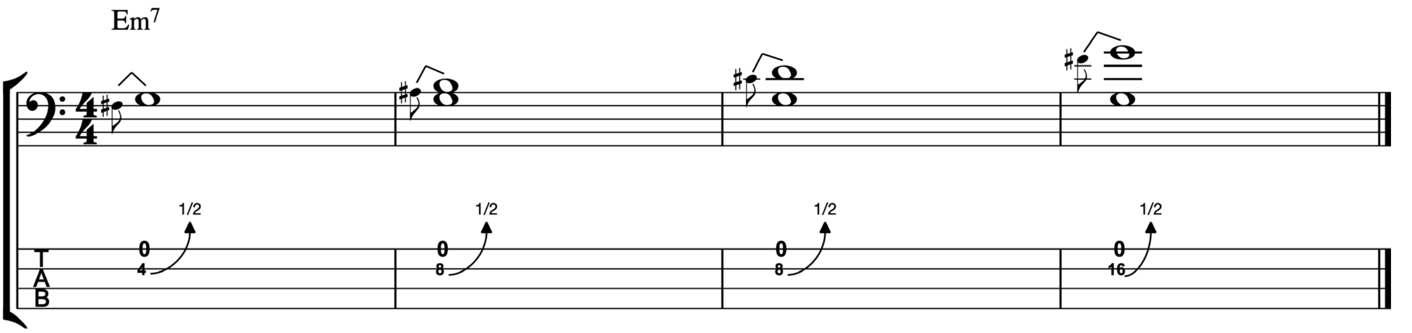
Since we're in the key of E minor here (what would a bassist's life be like without E minor?), the two G notes that we eventually come to, after the ascending bend, create the sound of the G being the minor 3rd of the E minor chord. This enables the listener to identify our chord as a minor one – and as we know, our main job as bassists is to outline the tonality of the chord to the listener… hopefully making them dance at the same time.

While the E and G strings ring, creating a minor third, bending an A# to a B resolves a diminished 5th into a perfect 5th

Let's keep going in the key of E minor and continue to outline the chord. If we pop the open G, while bending the A# up to a B natural and letting the low open E ring, we will be playing the root (E), minor 3rd (G), and 5th (B) of an E minor chord. Hey now!

(Oh, and in case you were wondering, that is the actual game jersey worn by Didier

Example 1



Drogba in the first game of the 2009 season for Chelsea when they faced Hull City – and the legend scored a brace that day. Thank you Julien… I LOVE YOU!)

We continue with the same technique, bending the C# (11th fret) to an D (12th fret) to outline an E minor 7th chord (E root, G minor 3rd, F minor 7th).

And then we complete the cycle, bending the F# up to a G, which is an octave above the open G (what a groovy sound) and we have just open note-bent our way to an Em7 arpeggio!

> "FIND NEW WAYS TO OUTLINE CHORDS USING THIS CONCEPT"

Your left-hand technique is going to be very important to pull this off. You need to really arch the fingers of your left hand and flex your finger joints to come straight down on the strings so that your fingers will not touch the G string. If you do, it won't allow the G string to ring and sustain – and of course, you have to bend the A string away from the G string.

Fortunately, I've watched way too many videos of the great Canadian pianist Glenn Gould playing piano, and certainly my background in playing the piano has helped not only with two-hand independence, but in technique. Everyone plays differently, but when my fingers are really arched and pushing the strings down on the neck at a 90-degree angle, I get a fantastically clear tone.

Why stop at E minor? Check out this lick from a song I wrote called 'Sexually Active', which uses the same concept to outline a G chord.

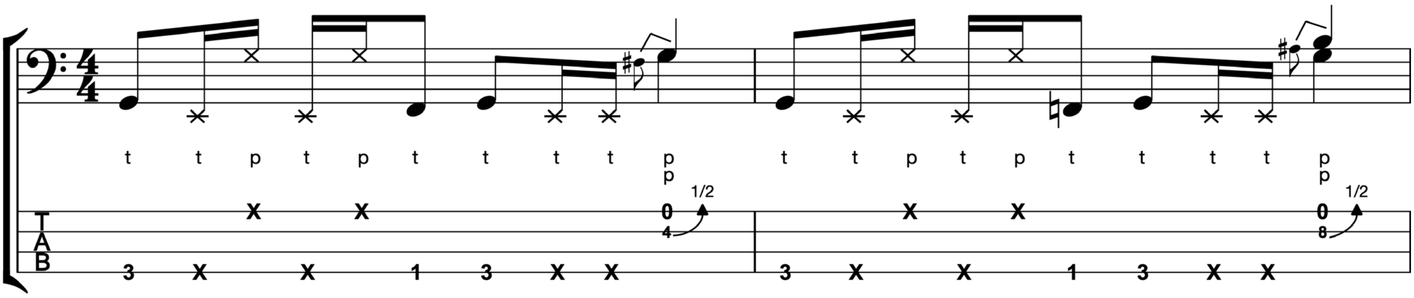
Although I don't add the 7th, you can easily do this by bending the E on the 14th fret of the A string up to an F to create the dominant 7th. After that, let's create a G Major 7th; you'll need to bend the F natural on the 15th fret up to F# on the 16th. And how about G minor? Play the open G and then bend the A natural up to a Bb on the A string to create the minor 3rd.

I hope that this will inspire you to experiment and find new ways to outline chords using this concept. A few hints to get you started – C works well, as the open G will be the 5th of C major or minor, and an open G is also the major 3rd of an Eb Major chord. Good luck!

www.stuarthamm.net

Having learned Stu's techniques, resist the urge to cackle maniacally and shout 'You fools! Now the power is mine!

Example 2



STAR BASS

Each month we celebrate the great — and rather less great! — work of an acclaimed bass player. This month: Abraham Laboriel

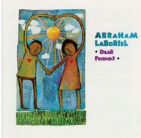
Words: Joe Shooman Image: Getty

With over 4000 recordings under his belt, Abraham Laboriel López Sr. is rightly heralded as a legend of the bass. Hailing from Mexico City, he studied at the Berklee College of Music, where his classical guitar training gave him a huge advantage in technique when he turned to the low end. None other than Henry 'Pink Panther' Mancini advised him to get stuck in to the LA session scene in the 1970s, and since then Laboriel has recorded with countless names in the industry. His back catalogue includes work with Elton John, George Benson, Herbie Hancock, Leo Sayer, Michael Jackson, Paul Simon, Madonna and Stevie Wonder, and he's also found time to record several solo albums with his son, Abe Laboriel Jr, on drums; the latter also tub-thumps for Paul McCartney. His four-finger plucking – actually three fingers and thumb – is testament to those classical guitar beginnings, and fans of technique have studied Laboriel's beautiful, expressive style for decades. Left-hand tapping and paradiddles with both hands are only the start of it; he is a true phenomenon.

MUST-HAVE ALBUM

Henry Mancini & His Orchestra Symphonic Soul (1975)

Laboriel first recorded with a rock'n'roll group, Los Traviesos, at the tender age of 10, before working as an actor and musician in Mexico. It was the influence of Henry Mancini that propelled him into the stratosphere, and so we begin with *Symphonic Soul*. On 'Satin Soul', a Barry White/Van McCoy-written piece given the big band treatment, Laboriel skips and funks underneath smooth strings; there are also glissandos and hints of slap in evidence. He then gets a chance to show his skills on the syncopated 'Butterfly', Herbie Hancock's prowling and dramatic piece, in which Laboriel plays with octaves, ninths and jazzy flutters before heading up the neck for a fantastic solo that's fast but never frantic. Laboriel's pop-and-slap greatness is upfront in the splendid 'Peter Gunn (New Version)', including some fine chordal work and the sweetest major thirds known to man. Two minutes of amazing bass pass before that familiar riff takes it home.



WORTHY CONTENDER

Abraham Laboriel Dear Friends (1993)

Laboriel has said more than once that he plays the bass like the drums, and that J.S. Bach's figured bass is his biggest influence. This makes sense when you listen to his solo work. *Dear Friends* certainly has the concept of a melodic bottom end up front; 'Holidays' is a conversation between the piano and bass that creates a panoramic and catchy piece of music. Of the many basses that Laboriel has played over the years, he's often returned to a Yamaha TRB or BB2000. He's also used Tylers, a Leduc MM5, a Status Graphite six-string and the headless acoustic Bassline Worp. Here, we reckon it's Yamaha all the way. Ultimately, it's all about that groove, and 'Samba 7' brings together his South American background and his jazz training. Sticking mainly to roots and octaves, he also finds space to show off up the neck with some snazzy turns and interjections. He's also a team player par excellence, and is restrained and smooth on the lovely 'Simple Self', which features Larry Carlton's gorgeous guitar.

COOL GROOVES

Quincy Jones The Dude (1981)

The scarily-talented Jones assembled a crack team for this one – Laboriel's skills are in outstanding company. 'Ai No Corrida' has him alternating octaves with seventh-heavy slap runs, while on the title track he embellishes whole-note roots with high-neck hammer-ons and pull-offs underneath vocals from James Ingram and Michael Jackson. It's lock, lock, lock on the ballad 'Just Once', anchoring the root throughout. Each track has a different feel. There's a hint of bluesiness to the ultra-funky 'Betcha' Wouldn't Hurt Me', where Laboriel cuts loose to provide a harsh, trebly groove.
A holdover from the flamenco and classical guitar of his early career is his use of fingernails for added rasp. Strings used included GHS Brite-Flats, particularly with his fretless Sabre, and also GHS Super Steels. For a microcosm of the funk of Laboriel in one track, check out 'Turn On The Action'. Top-notch technique allied with superb feel, subtle tonal control and dynamic understanding – incredible stuff.

WILD CARD

Various Artists Frozen Soundtrack (2013)

Yes, really. If you can bear to, listen to the mega smash hit 'Let It Go', where at approximately one and a half minutes, Laboriel jumps into the fray with a surprisingly complex on-the-beat set of sixteenths and continues to drive the song through to the ending. You'll hear where John Deacon got some of his inspiration, as the drama ramps up and the bass gets smoother and more prominent. It's a great arrangement, and a superbly-delivered performance by the bassist. His simple walking bass on 'Love Is An Open Door' is irresistible, giving the vocalists plenty of energy and space in which to do their thang. The syncopated funkiness of the second verse is pure, undiluted Laboriel. His Yamaha TRBX – used on parts of the soundtrack – may be a budget instrument by some standards, but why spend a fortune when you have this level of brilliance? He also used a Line6 StageSource L3T mixer/cab/preamp in the studio, praising the versatility of its tones. Latterly, Laboriel also plays Wyn Guitars' Ziricote E to E six-string bass.

AVOID AT ALL COSTS

Helen Baylor Start All Over (1993)

The vocals are superb, the bass tight and funky, but the tracks are middling at best in this rare moment of mediocrity marring Baylor's stellar career. Laboriel has appeared on countless Christian music recordings over the years, including Alvin Slaughter's spectacular 1996 LP *God Can!*, but this isn't up to the usual standard. Heartfelt it certainly is, but 'Doxology (Al Dios de Bondad)' meanders to little effect around the more mundane edges of the Latin music at which the bassist is so proficient. Saccharine doesn't start to cover it on the smug 'God Is Able', but bloody hell, what a bass performance from Laboriel. Incredible intro aside, he could play this stuff in his sleep, letting the song dictate the complexity (or not) of his line. All in all, it's a very rare disconnect between the artists and their audience; 'You Are My Fortress' ends it all in cod-dramatic manner, but 'What's Going On' it's not. Great playing, lovely sentiment, but stinky songs. Listen to *Frozen* again to clean out your ears, folks.

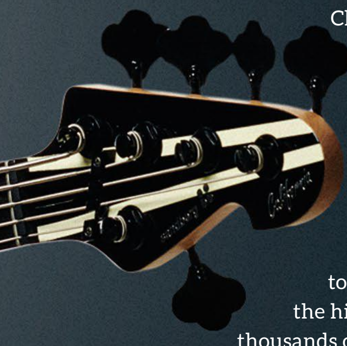
CHOW

Heavy Weather

We bring two titans of rock bass together to hear their combined wisdom on all things connected to the low frequencies. Let's hear it for Thunder's Chris Childs and Stone Sour's Johny Chow...

Interview: Joel McIver **Photos:** Olly Curtis, Matthew 'Stubs' Phillips, Travis Shinn, Nate Peracciny

It's been 30 years since the British veterans Thunder first bestrode a stage, and a mere 22 since Chris Childs joined them (he reckons they still think of him as a new arrival). The Iowa-based rockers Stone Sour are right on their heels, having formed back in 1992, with their bassist Johny Chow (yes, there's just one N in his name; we predict a flood of "corrections") signing up seven years ago. Aged 59 and 46 respectively, the two fleet-fingered low-enders bring decades of experience to our front cover, with Childs coming up in the era of Led Zeppelin and jazz-rock, and Chow a punk-rock upstart. What they have in common is a determination to deliver bass of the highest quality, thousands of accumulated air miles en route to the world's biggest arenas – and a stack of useful knowledge to impart at our once-in-a-lifetime bass conference. Let's pull up a couple of chairs, pop some beers and watch them go...



Welcome, gentlemen. Tell us what you're up to at the moment?
Chris Our new album, *Please Remain Seated*, is reworkings of old Thunder songs – but literally the only things the new versions have in common with the originals is the chords and the lyrics. We stripped everything back and approached them all differently. One of them, which was a full-on rocker before, is a lounge tune now, and it has a bass solo on it – the first one on a Thunder album. We did the songs live, which I love doing.
Johny It was the same for us on our last album *Hydrograd* – old-school, live, and together in the studio. It's the best way.
Chris We have our 30th anniversary coming up this year, so it was great to come full circle.
Johny Thirty years is a hell of an achievement.

"I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT BASS WAS, BUT I SAW MY FRIEND DOING IT AND ASSUMED I COULD DO IT TOO"

Stone Sour have been around for a while too, correct?
Johny Since the Nineties, yeah. I met those guys when my band at the time, Systematic, supported them on their first tour. After that, I stayed friends with Jim Root [then-Stone Sour guitarist, also of Slipknot] and when I knew that I'd have some time off from the band I was in, Cavalera Conspiracy, I called Ozzy's bassist Rob Blasko – who has a management company, and his ear to the ground – and asked him if he knew any bands who needed a bassist. Stone Sour had just recorded an album with Rachel Bolan of Skid Row on bass, but Rachel couldn't do the tour. That was 2012, and I've been with them ever since. We're close to the end of the *Hydrograd* cycle now, after close to two years on the road. It's a great time for us.

How did you get started on bass?
Johny When I was younger, my favourite band was U2, and my dad bought *Rolling Stone* for me the first time they were on the cover. My first album was the *Star Wars* soundtrack LP, with the gatefold sleeve; I listened to that a million times. My dad loved classical and opera, so that was always around me.
Chris I've got really eclectic tastes in music; I discovered rock when I was around 11 years old, which was Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and Deep Purple. But I also loved Motown; I listened to all kinds of stuff. I started playing the guitar when I was 11, and by the time I got to 15 I realised that there were far more guitarists in my area than bass players. Bass seemed like an obvious thing to do.
Johny It's a similar story for me. I knew I wanted to play music with my friends, but I didn't know what music was, let alone how to play it. But around the same age as you, Chris, I had a neighbour across the street who played drums, and another friend from school who played guitar, so I wound up with a Gibson 335 guitar that only had the four low strings on it. I didn't really know what bass was, but I saw my friend doing it and assumed I could do it too. My friend's dad had an amp, so we rolled off all the treble and pushed up the bass, and he told me to play single notes with my fingers and follow him. The 335 had flatwound strings on it, which helped solidify the low end a little more.

Which bassists influenced you?
Johny For me it was John Paul Jones. If you listen to what he does with the kick, the hi-hat and the snare, and the transitions he does with walking up and down, you can hear that he and the drummer John Bonham move as a rhythm section and not just as separate musicians.

Chris JPJ was a huge influence on me, absolutely. The way he worked within the song was incredible. My favourite bass players have always been those who play for the song. For example, John Entwistle wasn't a particular favourite of mine when I was growing up, but having learned a few songs by the Who, I realised exactly what he does and how much he brings to the songs. There's something that he did that I've never noticed before; in some passages, he will play the same rhythm as the lead vocal. Not necessarily the same melody, but exactly the same rhythm.
Johny It's funny that you say that, because the Who was another one of my favourite rock'n'roll experiences. When HBO first came out, they showed a concert by the Who and my dad let me stay up late to watch it. Much later in my playing, I became aware of exactly what you're saying about the importance of Entwistle in that band. He made the bass very much its own instrument, especially later on, when rock bass was just there to fill things in. Back in the Nineties, bass didn't have its own identity; it could have been substituted with a keyboard. I loved Chris Squire, too – there was something in his fingers. It was all about the way he played, rather than his tone. A lot of people don't realise that tone is in the fingers. He had such an aggressive, in-your-face way of playing that you couldn't fail to notice it.

What were the key moments in your bass careers?
Johny Chris mentioned Motown earlier. When I was about 20 years old, I moved to New York City and started going to see club gigs. I remember hearing soul and funk bass parts, with slap bass driving the lines, and thinking 'Whoa!' After that I got into ska and then reggae, with those bass-lines that never stop moving and never quit. That led me into James Brown, and I really started to understand it. I'd sit there and I'd listen to Bootsy Collins and my jaw would be on the table.
Chris I did it the other way round; I got into Louis Johnson and Jaco Pastorius and then got into rock later on. I'd never heard a single Thunder song before I joined them in 1995. I was with Go West before that, which was Eighties pop with very precise bass parts. It was all about being really tight and technical, which was why I wasn't a fan of John Entwistle in the early days. As I've got older, my playing has got looser. You really need to have all of those styles under your belt, and be able to call on them all.
Johny I watched some clips of you on *Top Of The Pops*. I love it – that music is awesome.
Chris Thanks! It was a great time to be a bass player. I was working in the Bass Centre in Romford, and on Saturdays it was hell, because it was the golden age of slapping. I worked with Stuart Watson, who designed the first Trace Elliot amplifier. Rob Green was in the next room, designing Status basses.
Johny I know a lot of musicians who got serious about their playing when they were 15

GEAR

Basses | Sandberg Enigma, Ernie Ball strings
Amp | Fender Bassman 800 head, Fender cab
Effects | None

or 16, studying music, taking lessons and really understanding how to read and write music. To this day I've never had a lesson.
Chris Me neither.
Johny For me, the moment came when I got sucked into early punk and new wave. I went to a show in Buffalo where a local punk rock band, the Painkillers, were playing – and my jaw was on the floor. At the same time, though, it seemed attainable, because it was at a low level; the kids were all slamming into each other and sweating on each other. My other friends were all having their first concert experience with AC/DC in arenas full of 30,000 people. That seemed so unattainable to me – they were rock stars, untouchable – but punk rock made me think 'I can do this'. That really drew me in to playing music.

Talk us through the basses you've played over the years.
Chris Right at the very start, I built my own basses. Later I went through Music Man basses; I still have my fretless Stingray, which I absolutely love.
Johny Great basses.
Chris I had a couple of Status basses, which are now long gone – which is one of my greatest regrets, although I'd probably never play them nowdays if I still had them, because their tone was very much of its time. I've also got various Fender Precisions and Jazzes, but not vintage ones. I've also got a really nice Gretsch Electromatic, which I use when a semi-acoustic feel is needed. If I had a lot of money, I'd have a lot of basses.

> "IN THE NINETIES, BASS DIDN'T HAVE ITS OWN IDENTITY; IT COULD HAVE BEEN SUBSTITUTED WITH THE KEYBOARD"

GEAR

Basses | Warwick custom Streamer, Nordstrand pickups, D'Addario strings
Amp | Eden Terra Nova
Effects | Darkglass Alpha Omega Dual Distortion, Earthquaker Devices Sea Machine chorus

Johny Ha ha, I hear that!
Chris I also have a Rickenbacker which I bought because I've always loved Chris Squire's playing and his tone, but I've never sounded like him because – as you said, Johny – it's all in the fingers. A lot of people don't realise this, but everybody's playing is in their fingers. You won't sound like another person, because you're not that person. You can buy the same gear and study their playing, but if you're not Chris Squire you'll never sound like Chris Squire.
Johny Absolutely right. My very first bass was a Charvel – neck-through, pointy headstock, midnight blue sparkle. At the time I was just plugging into amps and messing around; I didn't know about electronics or EQ-ing or anything because I was so young. From there I graduated to a Rickenbacker because I grew up in Buffalo, near Canada, and the radio stations up here always played Rush, so I was a huge fan of Geddy Lee. After that I wanted to get back to the bass tones of the music I grew up listening to, like the Clash. All those bands played four-string Precisions, so I bought a 1971 P-Bass in New York City and I still use it in the studio today. It has a tiger-stripe in the headstock wood, which a guy at Fender told me was extremely rare because it would have been considered a flaw. I bought it for $800 and the last time it was valued, it came out at $3500. It's a great bass.

Tell us about your signature bass guitars.
Chris Mine is a Sandberg, who I signed up with a couple of years ago. They're a small company and they keep volume down and quality up. The basses are beautifully finished and they're not incredibly expensive. I started with a California VM, and I loved it; it has such an aggressive sound, but it didn't look rock'n'roll enough for Thunder, so I mocked up a bass shape in Photoshop using the paint job from the Sandberg Forty Eight, their Thunderbird-style bass, and they took it from there.

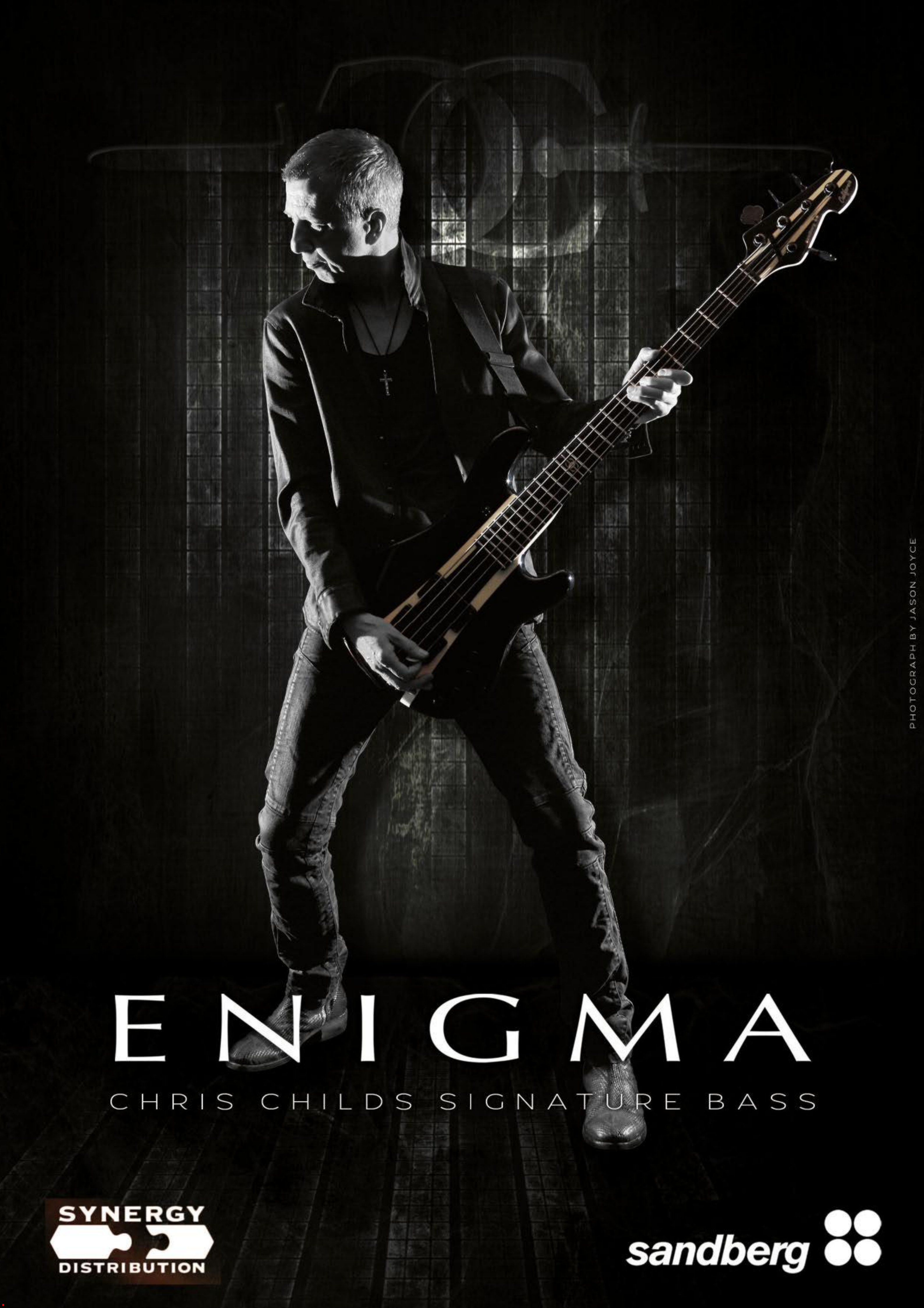
Johny German engineering – you can't beat it. I'm endorsed by Warwick, who make amazing basses. I played in local punk-rock bands in New York City for 12 or 13 years, and then I moved to Los Angeles around 2001 to join the band My Ruin, who asked me to tour the UK with them. All I had was my Fender P and a few pedals in my suitcase. After that I hooked up with Systematic, who were endorsed by ESP, so they got me a few basses; I played them for five years or so. Then I played with Fireball Ministry, a southern rock band, and eventually with Cavalera Conspiracy. Around 2010 I went to the Musikmesse in Frankfurt with Seymour Duncan, who were distributed by Warwick in Europe, and that was how I got to know the artists guy there. My custom Streamer is very versatile; I used it in Cavalera Conspiracy, which is an extremely fast, heavy band, and in Stone Sour, where a song like 'Through Glass' is almost like a prom song. I wanted it to have a classic Fender P tone, so we used a swamp ash body, a maple neck and a rosewood fretboard. I use Nordstrand pickups, which are amazingly versatile.

Are you both equally happy with four or five strings?
Chris I tend to play five-strings most of the time now. I'm happy with four too, but most of the things I do require a B string. I don't play six-strings; when you go that far, you're entering guitarist world! I'm not a soloist, although I admire bassists who can do it. I hung out with Snow Owl at the last London Bass Guitar Show. He's the nicest guy you'll ever meet, and when I saw him play I didn't know whether to laugh, cry or shit myself. He's a real virtuoso soloist – the sort of bassist who should play a six-string bass.
Johny I agree. Just because I don't play a certain style, it doesn't mean I don't have an appreciation for that style. For myself, what I enjoy playing doesn't require six strings, or even five most of the time. The same goes for eight-string and 12-string basses; I've tried them, and the tones are amazing, but the tuning issues are terrible unless you're in E. All my basses are four-strings, although on the last Cavalera tour I did, I took a five-string along to cover the low B tunings.

How many basses do you take out live?
Johny With Stone Sour we take out six basses; three front-runners for different tunings, and three backups.
Chris I take out two with Thunder.
Johny I wish it was only two, believe me!
Chris We keep it simple; there aren't any dropped tunings in Thunder. What's funny is that I also play in an Eagles tribute band with four guitarists. They take out about 25 guitars between them, and I take a single Sandberg! The one I take has a humbucker and a split-coil pickup, so it has all the tones I need.

So what does the future hold?
Chris We fall into the classic rock category now, I feel; if you're around long enough, and you can still play, that happens. Thunder has a second generation of fans now, with parents bringing their kids to the shows. Our singer Danny Bowes, who is also Thunder's manager, and our guitarist Luke Morley are very smart people in their respective fields. Danny is so forward-thinking, and Luke is incredibly prolific when it comes to songwriting.
Johny When I'm off the road, I spend time running our restaurant in Buffalo, Misuta Chows. Japan is my favourite country and Tokyo my favourite city, and the inside of our restaurant is made to look like it's outdoors, serving Japanese street food. The second floor has pinball machines and classic arcade games like *Defender* and *Pac-Man*, because I'm a child of the Eighties.
Chris We're very fortunate, but we also work very hard. I'm also an audio mixer and a graphic designer, so I'm always busy.
Johny I've also been very fortunate, but I don't think it has anything to do with my bass-playing – it's because I'm an easygoing, laid-back guy. Half of being employable in a band is your talent, the other half is determined by whether people can live with you on a tourbus for six months!

Any final nuggets of wisdom for our readers?
Chris If you're a bassist, you're born with it. If you're gonna play, you're gonna play, regardless.
Johny I agree with that. Bassists for life!
www.thunderonline.com, www.stonesour.com.
Thunder's album *Please Remain Seated* is out now on BMG; Stone Sour's album *Hydrograd* is out now on Roadrunner.



ENIGMA
CHRIS CHILDS SIGNATURE BASS
PHOTOGRAPH BY JASON JOYCE
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Phoenix Rising

Asked personally by mega-composer Hans Zimmer to take part in his touring symphonic experience, Juan 'Snow Owl' García-Herreros is taking Europe by storm

Interview: Hywel Davies **Photos:** Dita Vollmond

"When I first started playing this instrument, my guidance counsellor in high school said to me, 'Why are you going to pursue electric bass? You can't even play in an orchestra with it," reminisces Juan García-Herreros, aka Snow Owl – and all those years ago, those words might have had some truth to them. But today, García-Herreros has proved such naysayers very wrong.

After putting blood, sweat and tears into his passion, García-Herreros's extraordinary electric bass chops were precisely the reason why he has been hand-picked by Hollywood composer Hans Zimmer for a role in a particularly special project. *The World Of Hans Zimmer: A Symphonic Celebration* is an absolute must-see for any film or music buff, an international concert tour that will leave you speechless – if you're lucky enough to nab yourself a ticket that is. Zimmer's orchestra, anchored by García-Herreros, thrust you into the worlds of *Gladiator*, *The Lion King* and *Pirates Of The Caribbean* like never before.

We're in Geneva, Switzerland tonight, and after a personal tour of the orchestra, spirits are high all round as the Colombian bassist prepares to take the stage to a sold -out SEG Arena. With only minutes to unpack a lifetime's worth of bass, we manage to sit and chat backstage with the Owl himself

before he has to dash off and wow the socks off another audience. How did he end up playing for Zimmer, we ask?

"I've loved his music my whole life," says our man, "and it's an amazing blessing – because it happened by itself. I'm part of an amazing concert series in Austria, where I live, called *Hollywood In Vienna*. One year we did Hans's music from the film *Inception* – and, if I'm correct, he saw the video of my performance on Facebook, which is why he asked me to be a part of the band for the orchestra. It's an honour that he hand-picked me."

If you're familiar with the films for which Zimmer has composed, you'll already know that the German-born composer makes no secret of his love for the low frequencies. By incorporating the lowest sonic depths into his scores, his sound has become a benchmark for contemporary film orchestration in the surround-sound era. At the centre of all this is the bass, as García-Herreros explains.

"Hans has an unbelievable love for bass clef instruments. There isn't a score that he hasn't put electric bass players on to support his sound. He respects the spectrum of the sub-contra range. He's always using that and you end up having that 'warmth of a mother' effect, where you feel that you're inside, floating in space. He's the master of that, so his style fits perfectly for contra-bass. He's shown that bass players have the ability to do this these days, challenging whatever norms we've always lived with."

"This is the magic of what Hans does," he continues. "He knows what you can do as a musician and he lets you be that person. He wants me, as Snow Owl, to be myself. He even told us, 'Don't play the notes on the score, do more!' He trusts his musicians, because he's a musician's musician himself. I didn't have to change who I am, and I'm learning more about who I am because of this. I may be playing less in these concerts than what some people expect of me from seeing my own shows. I remember a Snow Owl fan saw the concert in Berlin and said to me, 'Where was the bass solo?' And I said to him, 'Listen – the entire concert is a bass solo!'"

The stakes are great on this project. With a full orchestra and thousands of listeners watching him, how does García-Herreros deal with the magnitude of it all? "The responsibility is one that I take with great honour and pride," he replies. "Bass players have huge responsibility when it comes to keeping time and rhythm, and that's especially true with my role playing this music – I have to drive it a lot. Me and the percussion have to march so closely in time for the string players, or else it can all fall apart. If you pay attention to the level of dynamics, and listen to the rhythms that I have to play constantly, I cannot fail one eighth note. I cannot! And that's a level of pressure that very few musicians can handle – but this is a responsibility that I am happy to take on. It's an honour to do it."

The bass guitar isn't the first instrument which most people think of when picturing orchestras. Why has it taken so long to find a place in the big ensembles, we ask? "First of all, bass technology is good enough that we can finally hear it," laughs García-Herreros. "But if you look at Mozart, and even before him to Bach, they were already using the first acoustic basses – three-string instruments which had an extension to the low D or the low C. We've been experimenting with basses for hundreds of years."

He continues: "If you look at the classical composers, they would always write their contrabass section as a double, so that you would always hear the lower notes properly. They would always have one guy playing pizzicato on the same line the others were bowing, just to punch out the notes. So, now we're doing that with the electric bass here. You'll hear it in *Gladiator*, there's a section that's only double basses and cellos – and the whole time I'm doing the physical attack so that their bowing has a push. Because it's being amplified through the speakers, you're feeling it inside of your body in ways that were not possible before. The age of the electric bass in the orchestra has truly arrived."

On the subject of technology, finding the right balance of tone, texture and volume in this environment is imperative. With his Neubauer six-string signature Phoenix model by his side, along with Aguilar DB 2x12" and

"THE AGE OF THE ELECTRIC BASS IN THE ORCHESTRA HAS TRULY ARRIVED"

1x15" cabinets and a DNA 1350 bass head, García-Herreros could easily overpower the orchestra and do some serious damage to the overall sound. How does he overcome this obstacle, we wonder?

"I compose for orchestra as well, which helps me out a lot," he says. "If you know your dynamics, such as what mezzopiano or mezzoforte means, you'll respect those intentions and you'll never step over somebody else. My advice would be to never let your ego overlap other people's parts – unless you're a soloist. It's about a collective voice, not a band of five, you know? I'm on stage with 70 other people and because they're so generous with my volume, I have to be generous with theirs. You have to leave your ego outside. There's no way you're going to get through this unless you're a team player."

"The key is flexibility," he adds. "In this project, you have to be flexible. Know your tones, and be very careful with your mids, because there are so many orchestral instruments that use those frequencies. I keep all my amp settings flat so you can hear the whole contrabass section. I've programmed all the other settings on my EQ pedal, which is a Focusrite iTrack Dock with an iPad, with the sound guys – so wherever I'm at, I have my sound and I can reproduce it whenever I want."

A self-professed film and comic book enthusiast, García-Herreros understands what this music means to fans all over the world. One particular piece tugs especially hard at his heartstrings. "I've been a Batman fanatic all my life," he muses. "Playing *The Dark Knight* gets me every time, because I'm such a huge fan. Every time we perform that piece I'm close to tears. I love that character so much because like him, I fought my whole life to be where I am now. After all that hard work, you see yourself in these characters who fight for your dreams – and then, when you're actually living that dream, nothing can compare to that."

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Alice Trooper

The Alice Cooper Band bassist Dennis Dunaway recalls the band's early successes

Interview: Joe Shooman Photo: Getty images

Think of Alice Cooper and what comes to mind is theatre, heavy make-up, crazy stage shows and hard-hitting, sometimes daft, sometimes singalong heavy rock. Alice himself – Vincent Furnier – is often noted as the single driving force behind matters. That's wrong; the Alice Cooper Band was begun thanks to bass player Dennis Dunaway.

"I started the band in 1963 because I'd seen Duane Eddy & The Rebels play during a feature film," recalls Dunaway. "I went back to my 16-year old buddy, Vince Furnier, and then the Beatles hit and we had to start a band. We decided in art class that we were going to incorporate theatrical ideas. Everybody else chose their instrument – and bass was what was left."

Finances and access to equipment are always central to a nascent career, and in Dunaway's case the restricted options cut a bit deeper. "At the time I had a crappy record player, so when I played a song I couldn't hear the bass," he remembers. "Glen Buxton [original Alice Cooper guitarist] sat down with me and started teaching me the names of the notes and where they fell on the neck. I fell in love with it, playing along with Rolling Stones records."

The original idea was to write for various characters that Furnier would play; alter

egos that would enable a chameleon presence onstage and open up countless possibilities. Originally, Alice Cooper was only one of those characters, but it quickly became clear that Alice was the best of them – and a perfect vehicle for the band's larger-than-life performances.

Artistry was present from the very start, as you can hear in the bass-lines Dunaway provided for the six albums recorded with the original band between 1969 and 1975.

"I always wanted to have my own style when I'd paint pictures," Dunaway continues. "At the time, everyone called me The Artist. I basically didn't want to be like anyone else. I wanted it to be interesting."

An early inspiration was Paul Samwell-Smith of the Yardbirds, whose way of taking blues-based patterns and making them more progressive taught Dunaway "that bass didn't have to stay in the groove".

"You could take it anywhere that you wanted," he says. "Back then the competition was the Beatles, the Stones, Hendrix: everybody was trying to do something different from the rest. So the bar was set very high. Everything we did from the very beginning was as a collective, all in the same room. We'd start from ground zero. There was a lot of finagling and exploration. Glen was very willing to experiment and we would exchange ideas, pushing each other to try things in a different way. It was infectious. I was always the crusader for doing something different and would blurt out all these crazy ideas, not all of them good. But it kept the creative atmosphere swirling."

"I WAS ALWAYS THE CRUSADER FOR DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND WOULD BLURT OUT ALL THESE CRAZY IDEAS"

Outsiders viewing the Alice Cooper band's writing process would sometimes get the wrong end of the stick, given the harsh-sounding put-downs and sarcasm flying about. However, the creative tension and openness to all ideas was central to the process.

"It was all to make it better," Dunaway says. "We had a rule that if anybody had an idea, you couldn't vote it down until you gave it a good try. There were five of us, so we had a vote and would move forward with no grudges. We would try every idea under the sun for every part of every song, and then decide what we thought was the best part."

So which were Dunaway's favourite bass-lines?

"Early on we had a song, 'Return Of The Spiders'. When we got drummer Neal Smith in the band, he'd been in a surf group in Phoenix, Arizona. He played 'Wipeout' and we did it at rehearsal. Then we took the drum idea and made a song out of it, with a rolling bass-line. It was quite a physical workout to keep the bass part going at that tempo."

Equipment limitations made an impact on what was possible. Dunaway's first bass was an Airline, which had a short-scale neck; he found it difficult to play due to the closeness of the frets. That didn't stop him using the plank on the band's 1969 debut, *Pretties For You*, released by Frank Zappa's label, Straight Records. The bassist then went through a period of losing instruments in cheap motels.

"Every time something would get stolen; I had off-brands I didn't even know. Later, I got a Gibson EB-0 with one pickup, so I added another one in the neck position. With each instrument change your style changes."

A turned-over truck on the LA freeway also impacted on the band's second album, *Easy Action*.

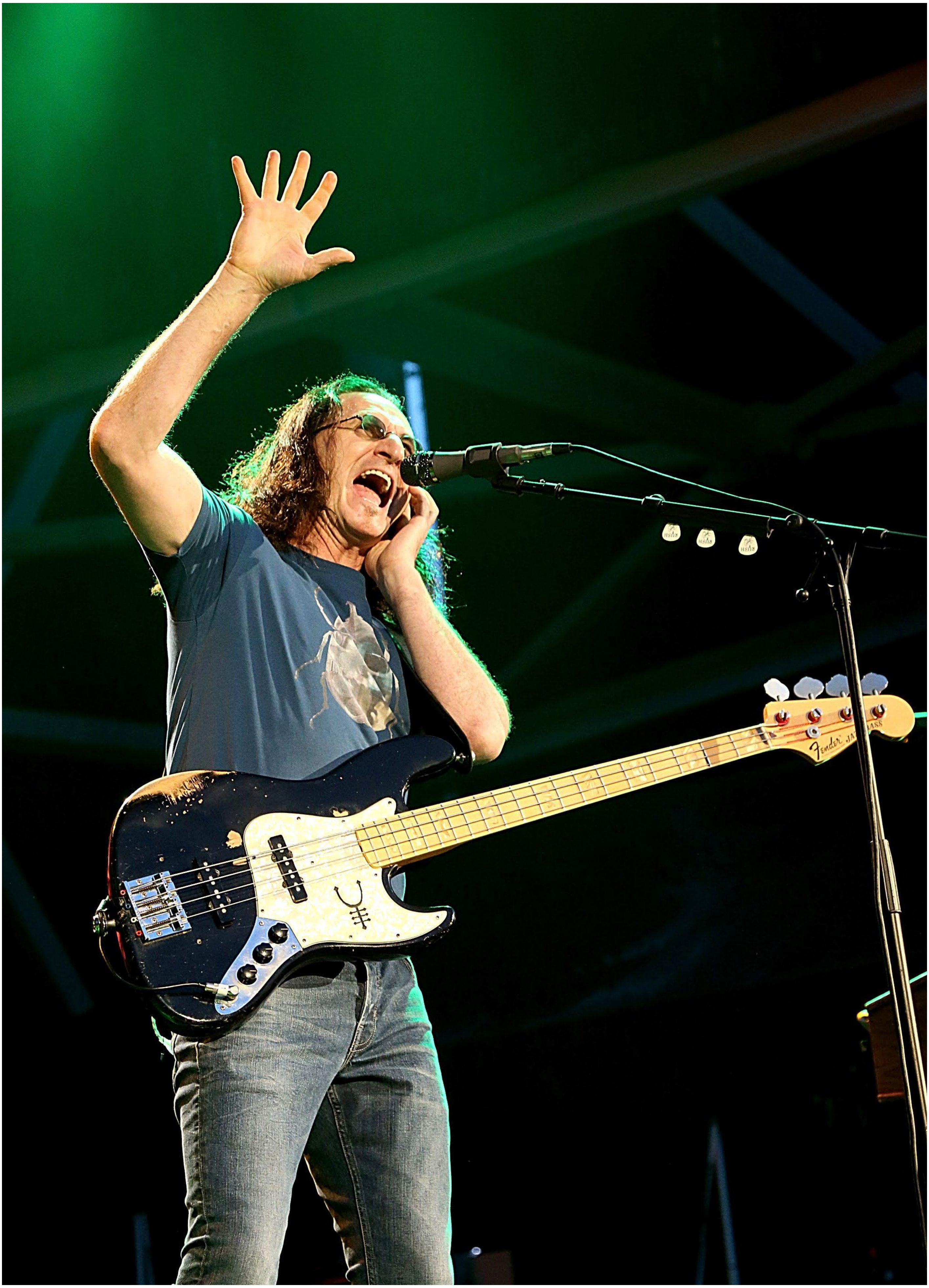
"All our equipment was destroyed. We weren't ready to record, and I didn't even have a bass. David Briggs, the producer, directed me to a cupboard and in there was a short-scale Hofner. The bass is bubbly, with that kind of Paul McCartney feel," Dunaway says, revealing that he still has a Hofner and pulls it out on occasion when working on a song.

Dunaway's career with Alice Cooper – plus the rest of the band – came to an end when Furnier went solo with a new band in 1975. Dunaway talks about it at length in his recent book, *Snakes! Guillotines! Electric Chairs!* Tales of boiling strings and on-the-road shenanigans with crazed biker gangs are numerous. There's plenty of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll too, all the way up to the original band's triumphant reunion and induction into the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame.

Still, Dunaway is refreshingly ungeeky about aspects of his craft. "People ask, 'What's the setting on your amp?', and I'm like, 'I don't know, I'm just trying to get a good sound that lets people hear all the notes'. Most of the time I don't change a dial to get a different tone, I just pick closer to the neck or mute with my hand. The variation in tones is due to how the strings are played."

"There are so many bass players out there and they all have their own technique," he adds. "Which is fine. Do what works for you. Every time I plug into an amp I tweak it differently to take into account the acoustics of the room or whatever. Maybe I'd be a better bassist if I did focus more on technique – but I'm more concerned about the notes I'm going to play."

www.dennisdunaway.com



Geddy Reader

Geddy Lee of progressive-rock titans Rush, now retired from the road, has been spending his time wisely – writing the ultimate bass book. We catch up with the bassist-turned-author...

Interview: Ellen O'Reilly **Photos:** Getty **Book excerpts:** Courtesy of Harper Collins

It's a cold rainy day in London as I make my way through the crowded streets into one of the swankiest hotels in Kensington. A top-hatted usher takes my coat and umbrella in the foyer, making me feel like a princess – which is only appropriate as I'm here to meet rock royalty!

When Geddy Lee is shown over to our table, he's exactly as I hoped he would be; pleasant, calm, well-mannered and undeniably Canadian. He's wearing a T-shirt, jeans and plaid shirt combo, combined with John Lennon-esque glasses which he peers over when making a point. My internal Rush fangirl is jumping for joy, but he's not here to talk about the legendary trio, he's here to talk bass. As if he wasn't enough of a connoisseur on the subject, publisher Harper Collins have recently unleashed *Geddy Lee's Big Beautiful Book Of Bass* on the world, and we're here for the low-down on this epic volume, available now for around the 50 quid mark.

Asked how this huge tome came into being, Lee explains: "The book started as an idea about three years ago, but it's been just under two years of solid effort to get it done. I have a pal, Daniel Richler, who lives here in the UK, and he kept saying 'You should do a book' so I decided 'You know what, there's stories to tell, there's things to talk about'. When you have as many instruments as I do, and you've been so obsessed with their histories and their minutiae that you have to put the details somewhere, I thought the best place to put them is in a book. So I said, 'Well Dan, you're gonna help me then' and he was the guy I sat down and argued over each word with. He helped me find my voice."

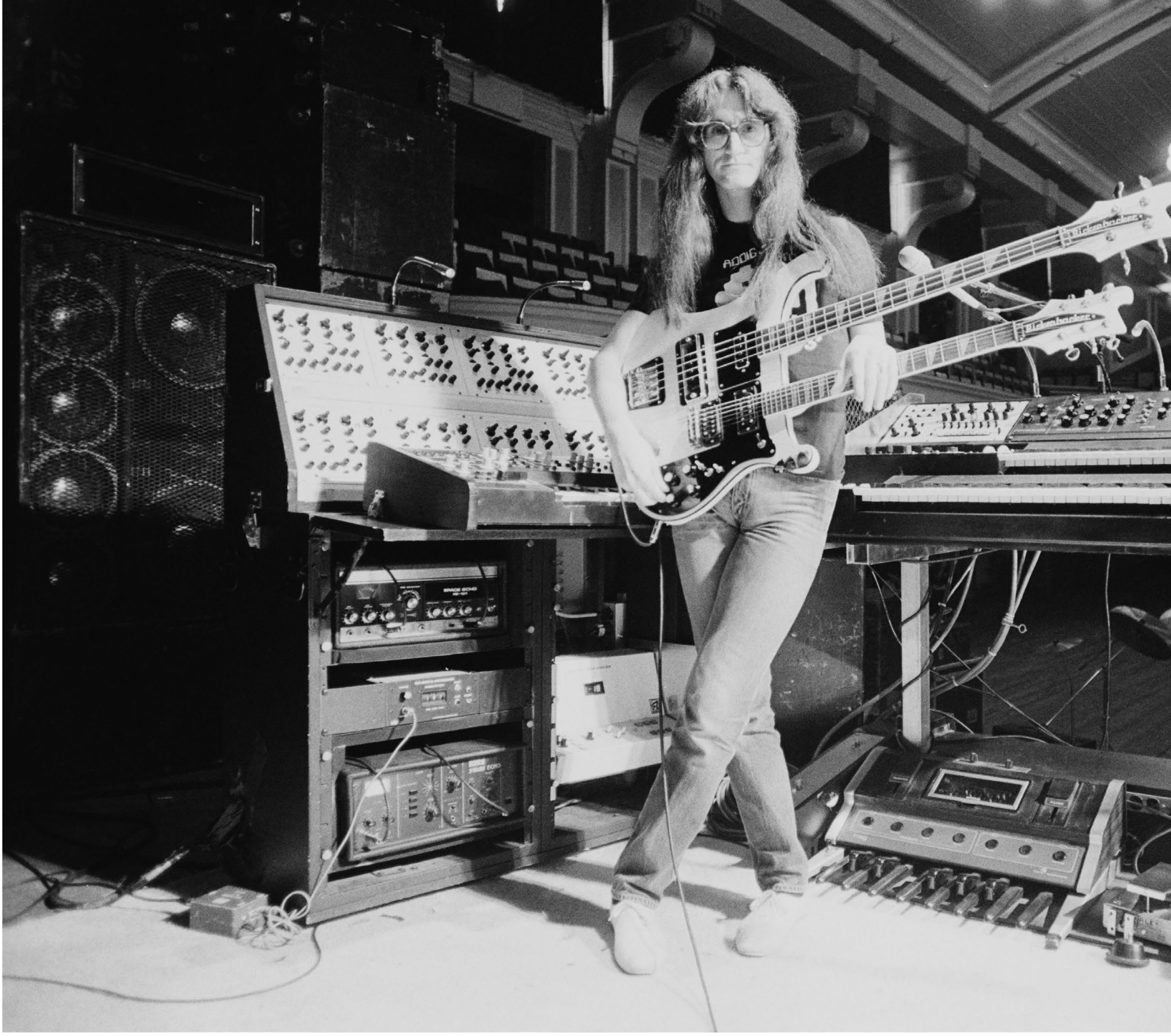
Sipping his tea, the great man continues: "Dan was a good writing partner, and the photographer Richard Sibbald basically moved into my house and set up a photo booth on the third floor. My wife very generously gave up her art studio to accommodate what she thought would be a month or two of shooting, which then turned into about a year. We ended up with about 30,000 photographs to edit down to about a thousand. The book features 250 basses from my collection, but since we went to press I've acquired a few other beauties – so version two will have to take care of those."

Has Geddy always collected basses, I ask? "No – for most of my career I just focused on the tools I needed to get my sound. My instruments were originally only things that I felt would help me develop my sound, where my ear was at, and where the band's sound was at. I didn't really pay attention to collecting those things, and it really wasn't until 2013 or '14 that I started really getting the bug. What happened was, a fellow approached me to do a swap. He said, 'I've got some of these mid-50s Fender P-Basses' – you know, the kind that Sting plays – and he said 'Would you be interested in exchanging one for one of your stage instruments?' I said, 'Well, I'm not trading my stage instruments, but I would like a P-Bass from my birth year, 1953'. You know, when you're a wine collector, you always look for wines from your birth year – so why not have a bass from my birth year, especially since it was so close to the beginning of bass guitar history?"

> "THERE I WAS, A MUSICIAN PLAYING FOR 42 YEARS WHO HAD NEVER PLUGGED IN AN EB3!"

He goes on: "When I started looking into them I started getting really curious, and as I say in my book, when I get curious it's a dangerous thing, because suddenly I wanted to know all about Leo Fender and the early years of the Fender company. I decided that maybe I should get an iconic bass like the ones that my heroes played when I was young, like a Gibson EB3 to represent Jack Bruce, and so on. So I started looking for them – and then I got the bug, and every time one arrived I was thrilled to plug it in, and of course it introduced me to a lot of instruments that were outside my tonal range. And that was fascinating for me, because there I was, a musician playing for 42 years who had never plugged in an EB3! You know, how ridiculous is that?"

On the topic of mass production, I wonder if Geddy includes any basses from independent luthiers in his book. He nods: "There's a couple,



such as the basses I have from Tony Zemaitis, who made them in the late 70s through to the 90s. They're pretty rare, so it was a lot of fun trying to track those down. The first one I bought from Bob Daisley; it was great talking to Bob about that. I interviewed him for my book and I went to Sydney to hang out with him. Then there was a Canadian luthier named Dino who was a friend of my tech [John 'Skully' Macintosh], and his is the only acoustic bass guitar that's in the book. So yeah, there's a few of those custom instruments."

Although Lee has been playing his signature Fender Jazz for two decades and counting, he'll always be associated with Rickenbackers for many Rush fans – and of course there are plenty of Rickys in his book. He explains: "I started in the earliest days playing a 1968 Fender Precision, which got me through the bars to the point where I was touring, and when I got my first advance I had to have a Rickenbacker just like Chris Squire. He played a '64 4001S and that was beyond my price range at that point, so I was just happy with a '73 4000. That was my main bass until 1977 when I got another one, because the '73 was getting pretty beat up. I stayed with Rickys for years and years.

"If you look at the early history of Rickenbacker basses, they made so few every year that they were almost like custom-made instruments. I go to great lengths in the book to talk about that, because I have three Rickenbacker 4000s from 1961. You can see that even though one of them is only four serial numbers away from the other one, they are vastly different. Not so much tonally, but structurally – the thickness is different, the shape and the tilt of the neck is different, the way the headstock is made is different. You can see that they were figuring it out, and I find that really fascinating. The bass that eventually became my number one bass, the two-pickup version of the 4001, had very humble beginnings. In those early days they were making so few that even though they weren't luthier instruments, they kinda were."

So what's the mission of the book? "Well, a lot of things come into play when you look at it," muses Geddy. "I'm really fond of mid-century Italian basses, because they're so beautiful and their details are so extravagant that a lot of the big three American producers wouldn't have taken the time to do those kinds of details. Now they don't sound like the big three, but they have a profound and lasting tone, and when you look at them – especially with a view to photographing them – they're pieces of art. That was a huge thrill for me, to discover them and to show the details that have come and gone, but it became a window to a lot of different things. Who knew that these companies actually made their bones as accordion manufacturers? That explains some of the details on the instruments – the push buttons and the sparkle. It was really fun. I know this all sounds like I'm a crazy, obsessive nerd – but that's what I am!"

Geddy Lee's Big Beautiful Book Of Bass is out now on Harper Collins, while UMe/Anthem are reissuing Rush's 1978 album *Hemispheres*.

1960

Höfner 500/1

SUNBURST

Of all the early Höfners, this is my favorite. It's got those great-sounding closely spaced single-c
"Toaster" pickups near the neck for maximum low end, which started to appear on Höfner basse
1960. The slimmer neck—made possible by the introduction of a truss rod—feels lovely to play.

Top left: Rather than using their two-a-side strip tuners, Höfner fit this beauty with individua
Gent "rugby balls." *Left:* These narrow tortoiseshell control panels started to appear in 1957, a
circular ones were being phased out.

FENDER / JAZZ BASS

1965

Fender Jazz Bass

SILVER SPARKLE

Vintage sparkle-finished basses are true one-offs. The finishes were made from crushed mirror or metal flake, suspended in poly. They were only available by special request, and they seem to be the rarest of all Fender custom instruments. Fender wasn't properly set up for spray-sparkle finishes, so it outsourced them to local automobile customizers and hot rod builders, which were all over SoCal at the time. This bass dates to 1965, and it walks the line between pre- and post-CBS takeover, with the older reverse clover leaf tuners, newer bound neck with pearl dots, and, unusually for a Jazz Bass, a pearloid pickguard. You can tell these things are made for the spotlight. They come alive the moment there's direct light on them, whether it's in a room in Vegas or a honky-tonk in Bakersfield (or the Air Canada Centre in Toronto, for that matter).

CAVEAT EMPTOR, OR "BUYER BEWARE"

Because there are so few of these critters, salespeople love to claim their Sparkle has a kinship to the Buckaroos of Bakersfield (Buck Owens and the Buckaroos, including bassist Doyle Holly, famously used all-Sparkle instruments). This one, like Doyle's, has a crushed-mirror poly finish, but that's where the similarity ends. Every shot I've seen of him playing bass with the Buckaroos shows his Sparkles have maple fingerboards, not rosewood.

Above: Doyle Holly playing his Sparkle P-Bass with Buck Owens and the Buckaroos, 1969

86

GIBSON

THUNDERBIRD

I've been touring for more than forty years and, though it may sound weird, in a sense playing in a vacuum, because I've been so focused on the sound I wanted to achieve—my *identity* in sound, if you will. I've used only the instruments I believed could get me to that sonic place. I pushed everything else out of the way! So here I am forty-four years later, looking more closely than ever before at the early days of bass, and learning things I would have known had I given myself access to them then. Like the Thunderbird.

Of my era, I know that bassists like John Entwistle, Glenn Cornick of Jethro Tull, and Martin Turner of Wishbone Ash have all played the Thunderbird to great effect, and I've shared the stage with others who've done the same, but that instrument always seemed odd and cumbersome to me—and, again, not *my* sound. I remember touring in the 1980s with bands such as Mott the Hoople, whose bass player, Pete Overend Watts, played a T-Bird, and, of course, UFO, in particular bassist Pete Way, who was a pal at the time and a devotee of the cult. The instruments confounded me, and so I once asked Mr. Way what it was exactly that he loved so much about them.

"Well, Glee," he replied, "they sound three-quarters quite good, and one-quarter not very nice."

Hah! But as much as I love that quote, I wasn't buying in. It wasn't until 2015, when my collecting obsession was in full swing and I'd started to appreciate Gibsons in the context of the early 1960s, that I tried out Thunderbirds in rehearsal with Rush. And that was when I discovered something important. . . .

As it turns out, the Thunderbird's bass sound suits Rush surprisingly well. Only now do I value the way it fits in the tonal register. It has the kind of bottom end that sits well below Alex's midrange guitar sound and the crash and swirl of Neil's "cymbalic" hardware array. No small feat! And although it doesn't have the *twang* I usually lean on so heavily, it does have definition of a different sort. Due to its tight and well-formed lower midrange and bottom presence, I find I can turn it up quite loud in the mix (where all bass should be anyway) without getting in the way of my bandmates—as in the songs "Animate" and "How It Is" on *R40 Live*. It took me a while to figure it out, but the T-Bird is winning me over.

How 'bout *that*, eh, Pete?!

Opposite: Pete Way of UFO *(Fin Costello/Getty Images)*

Left: Glenn Cornick with Wild Turkey at The Roundhouse, London, 1971 *(Michael Putland/Getty Images)*

GEAR

Basses | Anaconda Ultra J4, Anaconda TJ5E, Fender Jazz
Amps | EBS Reidmar 750, 410 Proline, Vanderkley 2x10 MNT, 1x15 MN6
Effects | Boss ME50B, G-Lab Wowee Wah, EHX Micro Bass Synth, Future Impact

Rising Son

A regular with Son Of Sam, Incognito, Sister Sledge, Gizelle Smith and other funk-heavy acts, Joe Sam catches up

Different gigs call for different approaches. I love writing bass-lines, creating melodies and sub hooks. I'm a big Paul McCartney fan, because he wrote the perfect bass-lines, and I try to take that approach if I'm in the studio. If you were to ask anyone that has seen me play or played with me, they'd probably say that I'm predominantly groove based and like to dig in. I love rhythm, I like to take control of a groove and drive it forward if that's what the song requires. My brother John is my favourite drummer, he's amazing. We formed Son Of Sam in our teens and we've been playing together since childhood. Having a drummer for a sibling is any bass player's dream. We have a deep pocket together. Funk is where I'm most at home.

I'm endorsed by Anaconda Basses and EBS. There's something special about dealing with independent companies. The attention and care you receive is unlike anything you'll get from a big corporation. I've been very lucky to have worked with Andrew Taylor-Cummings, he's a very skilled luthier and his basses are works of art.

I love slap bass but I'm old school about it. I prefer Larry Graham to Victor Wooten or Marcus Miller. I've learned many different slap techniques over the years. I would watch my favourite bass players and I noticed that they all had different techniques. Compare Flea to Larry, for example – the whole thumb-up or-thumb down thing. I would mimic them to try to figure out the benefits of each technique. I now incorporate them both for different situations. I like to double thumb too, like Prince or Brown Mark.

> "MANY BANDS PLAYING FUNK THESE DAYS ARE TOO BUSY, WITH MUSICIANS IMPROVISING AND NOT LISTENING"

It's important to listen. I find many bands playing funk these days are too busy, with musicians improvising and not listening. I've been guilty of this myself – it's easy to get carried away – but there's a reason why James Brown and the JB's sounded as good as they did; it's because everyone was playing their part respectfully as part of a collective, and there was no room for self-indulgence. That's why I love artists like D'Angelo or Vulfpeck, they know when to stop.

I recently released an album called *Cinder Hill* with my hip-hop band Son Of Sam. Many of the songs were written as far back as 2002; it's been a real labour of love. Back in the early noughties we were a live hip-hop band consisting of drums, bass, guitar and keys, playing a mixture of our own beats and classic breaks with various MCs and DJs. We did a couple of shows in Brighton supporting KRS-One and Raekwon from Wu-Tang. We always knew we had written some cool stuff, but it only came together when producer Tom Caruana got us all in a studio for a day in 2008 to record our beats. We added horns, flutes, strings, harps and percussion – all live instruments. I drew from my Paul McCartney and Pino Palladino influences, but I mainly tried to create samples in my head before laying down a bass-line that sounded like them. It's definitely a fun discipline!

https://sonofsammusic.bandcamp.com

Apollo Rising

The great Billy Sheehan returns to his progressive roots with Sons Of Apollo. Why have one bass neck when you can have two, he asks us

Interview: Mike Brooks **Photo:** Tina K

Billy Sheehan is one of the busiest bassists on the planet, showing no signs of letting up even though he's in several active bands – the Winery Dogs are currently preparing for a packed 2019 schedule; the embers of Mr Big are still aglow following the untimely passing of drummer Pat Torpey; and of course there's Sons Of Apollo, at whose London gig we met him recently.

"I love to play, it's my favourite thing in life," says Sheehan. "People send me their YouTube clips and I tell them they have to play with people on stage, in front of an audience. You don't need to be all that ready to play live, but get in a band and get to work! To play live is the greatest joy there is and any musician worth their salt will tell you the same. Working in the studio is one thing, but capturing that live in front of an audience is another level of difficulty."

Although he's now 65 and has been a professional musician for 40 years and more, Sheehan still sees room for improvement in his own playing. "I work hard at getting better, although that doesn't mean playing faster or using more notes. I'm working at it all the time; even when I get home and I get ideas, I record selfie videos and explain into the video what I'm playing and how I'm playing it."

Sons Of Apollo boasts a stellar line-up, including drummer Mike Portnoy and keyboardist Derek Sherinian, both formerly of Dream Theater. What does SOA offer to the prog genre in Billy's eyes? "There are funk and blues elements to this band, but inevitably, there are time changes and some free-form stuff in it too. I'm definitely old-school prog. I saw *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* with Peter Gabriel which was pretty amazing; when the first King Crimson album came out, that changed everybody. But when progressive music came out, it was a way to get beyond the basic chordal thing that we were stuck in. We got into a lot more improvisational stuff; Cream obviously caught a lot of people's attention. They were brilliant, and they came up with a lot of great stuff. I'm a big fan of classical music too, the second largest genre of music that I have in my two-terabyte library of music is classical. The complete collections of Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Mozart are in there, and they're a huge influence on me in terms of changes, counterpoint and how I think about music."

> "GETTING BETTER DOESN'T MEAN PLAYING FASTER OR USING MORE NOTES"

In typical prog tradition, Billy has opted for a double-neck Yamaha Attitude for the live shows, although for the recording of the SOA album, *Psychotic Symphony*, a standard black Attitude tuned BEAD was used. Was it problematic adapting to the double-neck instrument? "I used the black Attitude that I've used on a zillion records, so I recorded the whole record with that. They asked me to do a solo in the live set, but that bass doesn't have the range that I'm used to. I didn't know I'd need the double neck, but it actually works well, because the low neck is a little too low and the high neck is a little too high – but somehow between the two, I manage to function. It forces you to move away from your strong points and to focus on something else."

Sons Of Apollo's live set is particularly demanding, and even a player of Sheehan's standing has to put in the preparation. "Before this European tour, I hit it pretty hard and did my homework. I have to commit everything to memory, so I go over and over songs, especially if they're complex. I really want to own them and be able to play them without thinking. Once in a while, I've needed to use a cheat sheet; there was a Steve Vai song where every pass was different, nothing was repeated.

I wrote it out, put it on the drum riser, and as we got to the song, they exploded confetti everywhere. It rained down onto my sheet and I couldn't see a thing. So rather than have that happen, I take the time to prep so I don't create a catastrophe for myself. This particular show took a lot of work – but I like to work!"

As well as requiring a different type of performance, Billy's tone has also undergone a change for this project, which has been aided by his Line 6 Helix unit. "It makes things a lot easier and a lot less precarious when travelling around; with analogue gear, and I did travel around with the Pearce preamps a lot, at one point the power supply transformer broke loose inside and smashed around. I was an early adopter of digital equipment, and Line 6 have done a great job of replicating the Pearce preamp. They modelled it component by component off the board, which is pretty amazing. I tried the Kemper and the Fractal, which are both great pieces of gear, but the Helix is a little easier and more hands-on for me."

Keep your eyes peeled for a new Attitude, he tells us. "There's a new bass coming! Cosmetically, the new bass is much different, and it will be paying tribute to my past," he says, accompanying this with a nudge, a wink and some raucous laughter. "It will feature some artificial ageing to the neck, which should be awesome tonality-wise. It's essentially a LTD3 but the visuals will be striking and I'm very impressed with it. EBS are also talking about the next iteration of my signature overdrive pedal."

Mr Big fans will be heartened to know that the classic band, now comprising Sheehan with guitarist Paul Gilbert and singer Eric Martin, hasn't performed its last show yet, as their summer 2018 performances showed. "We honoured the bookings we had. We might go out and do something in 2019, we're talking about it," says Sheehan. "It's a cliché, I know, but when we play, people fly in from all over the world to see us. It's an amazing family of people, and they would love to see us play again. We may go out and say a proper goodbye and hold ourselves to it. Mr Big was the four of us but Paul, Eric and I are closer now than we've ever been, having weathered the storm that happened with Pat." Watch this space.

www.billysheehan.com

"I GO OVER AND OVER SONGS, ESPECIALLY IF THEY'RE COMPLEX"

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GEAR

Basses | Maruszczyk Wojtek Pilichowski Signature, Maruszczyk Frog
Amps | Aguilar DB 751, Aguilar AG 700
Speaker Cabs | Aguilar DB 410
Strings | IQS Wojtek Pilichowski Signature n (.035, .055, .075, .095)
Effects | Taurus Abigar MK-2, Taurus Tux Silver Line Compressor/Limiter, G-Lab Wowee-Wah, Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer Distortion

Eminent Power

The great Wojtek Pilichowski returns with a new album, *Vandal*. We bend the maestro's ear about technique, effects, and staying out of trouble

Interview: Freddy Villano **Photo:** Kaye Ford

Wojtek Pilichowski's musical journey began when he was just 14 years old in Warsaw, Poland, not only as an artistic pursuit, but also as a means to a better life. "I desperately wanted to be creative," he recalls. "Having listened to all kinds of music on the local radio station, I thought, 'This is something I want to try'. I never regretted this choice – music was my destiny." Practically speaking, however, music was simply another way to keep Pilichowski away from crime. "We lived in a dangerous district and my dad was frequently in penitentiary," he confesses. "My mom and grandfather saw the opportunity to nurture my interest in music as a way of steering me away from the local community."

Pilichowski adds that he gravitated towards bass due to its masculine, eminent power and eventually tried music school, but admits he didn't have enough persistence to follow his teachers. "No doubt they were professional, but I chose different mentors," he explains. "Marcus Miller, Stanley Clarke, Sting, Mark King, Pino Palladino, John Patitucci – these were my real teachers. and broadened my thinking. Now, when I teach or discuss education with my colleagues, I stand by my approach: find your own sound. The goal is not to mirror someone else, but to open yourself up and play your music."

Today, the 49-year-old Pilichowski is clearly adhering to his own principles on his latest solo release, *Vandal*. It's an eclectic blend of fusion, rock, jazz and traditional Polish music that features his singular-sounding, prodigious slap technique on stylistically varied tunes such as 'Old Fashion Show' and 'Check Up', among others. Recorded live, *Vandal* features the talents of Tomasz Machański (drums), Michał Trzpioła (electric guitar), Adrian Latosiewicz (Minimoog), Michał Rorat and Wojtek Olszak (piano), Michał Dąbrówka (xylosynth), and guest appearances by luthier Adrian Maruszczyk on fretless bass and Julita Zielińska on vocals. We recently caught up with Pilichowski in Warsaw to discuss his creative approach to the genre-bending music on *Vandal*.

Your tone on *Vandal* is killer. How did you track your bass?
I'm very lucky to be using the Aguilar DB 751, which is a charm when looking for a dream sound. The recording gear also included AKG D112 and Neumann U87 mics mounted on Aguilar DB 410 speakers. The signal then went to a Neve 1081 preamp. We also used the line-in of the amp.

What effects are you using on the slap solo in 'Old Fashion Show' and how much experimenting with it did your final take require?
I recorded this song using the Wowee-Wah from G-Lab and an Abigar MK-2 from Taurus.

> "MY 'SCHOOL' WAS LISTENING TO TAPES, CDS AND RADIO, NOT TO MIMIC, BUT TO UNDERSTAND"

It took a bit of experimenting to complement the guitarist's strong riffs. It was challenging, but we worked it out. I have the honour to work with friends, so even if we show off a bit and compete, eventually, we rub shoulders.

Do effects inspire musical ideas or songs, or do you apply them to ideas and songs after the fact?
I always apply effects later in the process. Effects can improve good sound, but won't replace creativity. My initial concepts don't involve them. Basically, I want to be able to play everything I compose, live. I like to be sure that I can deliver a good gig without any pedals whatsoever.

Can you talk a bit about how you use specific effects?
I use a lot of compressor without even thinking of it. But chorus, for instance, is a different animal. Usually when I hear it in the mix, it means there's too much of it. Reverb, on the other hand, supports me only when playing with fingers, but it doesn't work with slap. Also, I like to keep the wah-wah handy, rather as a filter, helping to phrase the playing. That's the main setup, maybe with distortion, but not very often.

Has it been a goal to incorporate traditional musical elements with modern bass sounds?
At first, I thought to have folk violins only in the openings of songs, a combination of ethnic sounds with electric fusion arrangements, but it was too good to stop there. I asked a folk band from the Polish highlands to join me in the studio and play their material, and I tried to mingle in. They started with 'W Pieninach Się Mrocy', and it was the bomb! I later sent the recording to Adrian Maruszczyk. He came up with a beautiful solo on his fretless bass. Adrian lives in Germany, so we created this bridge between different cultures, feelings and styles.

What about 'Gdybym Ja Gdybys Ty?'
That's inspired by 'The Wish, Op. 74' by Frédéric Chopin. I wrote it with Julita Zielińska. It began as a jam session but came together when she came up with the lyrics. I then reached out to a female folk band to support us, and while working on it, during a break, they spontaneously sang a traditional song from the highlands. It was like capturing lightning in a bottle. I asked them to sing it again, so we could record it. It worked immediately. It was incredible – I still don't know how it happened, but this is the magic of music that cannot be explained.

Vandal is out now on Universal. www.pilichowski.pl

Time Team

Jenny Lane of Rock Goddess discusses providing suitably divine bass for the metal veterans

GEAR

Basses | Fender Precision
Effects | Digitech overdrive
Amps| Amps Ashdown combo

I played a bit of guitar in my teens, mainly along to Oasis songs, but had all but given up as I was never very good at it. My parents always encouraged me to keep at it, though, and one day my friend talked me into trying the bass because he needed a bassist for his metal band. Three weeks later I was standing on a stage playing Metallica, Megadeth and Slayer covers, too petrified to peer up from my fretboard at the audience until halfway through the set. At that point I realised that despite the sheer terror I was feeling, everyone was having a good time – me included.

Me and a friend took a trip to Guitar Mania in Dorset and came out with an Ibanez GSR200 and a huge Laney MK II amp. We struggled halfway down the road with them before admitting defeat and calling a cab home. I still have the Ibanez, but the amp got sold on a few years ago in exchange for one I could actually lift by myself. I then went to music college for two years, which turned out to be incredibly valuable as it taught me how to play with all kinds of people in all sorts of situations. While there, I played in a few bands in my home town before moving to London, where I spent the next decade playing in various bands, including a punk-grunge trio called The Graphic in 2013.

I gigged around the UK and Switzerland with them, but when that finished, I was done with band monogamy; I played with anyone who asked me, just to get my chops up. I would often go and fill in for sick or absent bass players for my friends' bands – I had about six on the go at one point! Eventually, I got together my own band, Planet Of The Capes, and we'd go out and gig every time I wasn't busy with all the rest of it. The absolute high point of my bass-playing career to date has been landing the gig with Rock Goddess. It's by far the most challenging material I've had to learn, but playing it is exhilarating and Jody Turner writes monster songs with huge riffs – so much fun to get stuck into. They have a rich history and an amazing fanbase, and I feel very honoured to get to play with them. I've been very lucky to play with some superb drummers over the years and Julie Turner is one of the very best – she's everywhere on the drum kit at once, but she makes it look completely effortless.

> "I WAS DONE WITH BAND MONOGAMY; I PLAYED WITH ANYONE WHO ASKED ME"

My favourite bass to date is my black and white Fender Precision, which has been with me for almost every gig I've done over the last 10 years. I got it in Nottingham, when me and my boyfriend at the time were killing a few hours in a guitar shop and he persuaded me to have a go on it. Inevitably, I fell for it but didn't have the funds, so my lovely boyfriend bought it for me and let me pay him back in instalments. It's not worth a huge amount, but it's far and away the most precious thing I own.

My bass heroes are Steve Harris, Billy Sheehan, Carol Kaye, Les Claypool, Cliff Burton, Kim Deal, Julia Ruzicka and Peter Hook, and the bassist that got me into it all was Carlos D from Interpol. His bass-lines were so cool, as well as being weird, sleazy and sinister. Hearing him was the first time I realised how much more you could get melodically involved with a song, rather than just thundering steadily along underneath everything. That said, I'm still quite partial to a bit of steady thundering!

The greatest bass player that ever lived was Lemmy Kilmister. I only ever got to see Motörhead live once and I was miles back in the crowd, but he still managed to blow my head clean off. Pure savagery.

Sometimes when I'm struggling a bit onstage, I think 'What would Lemmy do?', and then I feel a surge of something undefinable and I'm usually all right.

Rock Goddess's album *This Time* will be released on March 1
www.rockgoddessofficial.co.uk

Models shown: IGB RC BLSL, IGB STD MBK, IGB STD MRS, IGB LUX BK GL

TEL: 01483 238720 I EMAIL: SALES@ARIAUK.COM I WWW.ARIAUK.COM
Aria UK, Unit 1 Silverdale Road, Craufurd Business Park, Hayes, Middlesex UB 3BN

Wed Alert

The Columbus, Ohio band Bridesmaid has two bassists, Bob Brinkman and Scott Hyatt. Hear them roar

Bridesmaid is instrumental and consists of two bass players and two drummers. "We mostly play heavy riffs – stuff that it's fun to bang your head to a little. To date, we've done a split with Sun Splitter from Chicago, and one of the *Heavy Haze* compilations," say Bob Brinkman and Scott Hyatt. Let's hear more...

Scott We've also self-released two full length albums, 2013's *Breakfast At Riffany's* and 2016's *International House Of Mancakes.* We've primarily toured the Midwest and East Coast DIY subsequent touring... so hit us up about that living room of yours.

Bob I got into bass when I quit piano and school band, but I wanted to play in a band with my friends. I convinced my parents to buy me a bass for my 14th birthday by playing at a local church's youth services. Twenty-five years later I'm still playing... the church part didn't stick.

Scott I started back in middle school when most of my friends played guitar and drums. I picked it up just as a way to play in bands with friends, but ended up loving it to the point where it became a lifelong passion and claimed much of my hearing in the process.

> "I'M WILLING TO BET THAT THE GREATEST BASSIST WHO EVER LIVED IS JUST SOMEONE THAT WE'RE NEVER GONNA HEAR OF"

circuits, and are just as happy playing your local metal bar as we are your living room, although that often results in local ordinance violations of the sound variety. Currently, we're in the writing process for a 2019 release with

Bob I learned on a four-string and I mostly play tuned B A D G. To get the intonation right I use a five-string set minus the E string, and the nut is filed out to accommodate the thicker string. Sean Bowers at the Guitar Repair Company does most of the work on our basses; he suggested it because he was tired of wrestling with with them so much to get them to stay in tune and intonated.

Scott I do play a five-string in a couple other projects where speed isn't always a necessity, but a huge bottom end sure is! I also enjoy the challenge of remaining creative in a 'limited' environment such as a four-string.

Bob The secret of playing bass well? I'll let you know when I figure out how to play well. I get by on practising and making sure I'm having fun with whatever I'm playing live.

Scott Practise relentlessly. Run scales and modes while watching TV or anytime you're bored. From a songwriting perspective, pay attention to the bass-lines of genres that you don't currently play – you'll find ideas that creep over into your actual playing. The best music is that which pushes boundaries, and it starts with keeping an open ear.

Bob I'm willing to bet that the greatest bassist who ever lived is just someone that we're never gonna hear of, who just plays in their bedroom or small club gigs just for fun.

Scott Or maybe Sid Vicious... when his bandmates unplugged him.

Bob Earthquaker Devices out of Akron brought us into their artist programme last summer. I was talking to a rep at a festival we were playing about how impressed I was with the Pyramids pedal, and things just sort of fell into place from there.

Scott We're currently a part of the Earthquaker Devices artist program, for amazing-sounding tones and effects. If White Castle is listening, holla at your boy.

bridesmaid.bandcamp.com

Bob Brinkman unleashes an unstoppable wave of prime cut riffage

GEAR

Basses | Bob: Kramer XKB-20, Guild 301B, LTD Stream 1004 with passive Nordstrand Big Blades pickups
Scott: Rickenbacker 4001 V63, Gibson Ripper, Gibson Grabber
Effects | Bob: Custom clean boost and phaser made from Electra MPC Modules by Nerdknuckle, White Face Reissue Rat, Earthquaker Devices Pyramids, Hummingbird, Tentacle, Darkglass Vintage Microtubes, Saturn Toneworks feedback looper, Russian Big Muff, Tronographic Rusty Box, Correct Sound Custom MT preamp
Scott: Nunez Amps Annex Bass Channel, Malekko B:Assmaster, BlackArts Toneworks Pharaoh, EHX Synth9, POG, Pitchfork, Holy Grail, Boss PS-6, DD-6, CEBO
Amps | Bob: Verellen Meatsmoke and Kalaloch, Acoustic 140 and 300
Scott: Verellen Kalaloch, Sunn Coliseum Bass Prototype, Sound City 120L, Sunn 4x12, Sunn 215BH Replica

This isn't a camera effect; this is the aura of awesome that naturally surrounds Scott Hyatt when he plays

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Every issue, Guitarist brings you the best gear, features, tuition and interviews to fuel your passion for guitar

Guitarist magazine is also available on Newsstand for iPhone, iPad & iPod touch

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GEAR REVIEWS

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass speakers and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's particularly useful for bassists, and we'll test recording equipment and general accessories every now and then as well, but generally speaking, this zone is for bass-specific gear.

We take the ratings that we give each item very seriously. *BGM* is the only print magazine devoted to bass in this country, and we have readers from all over the world, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your investigation, we'll say so; if it's flawed in some way, we won't hold back from making that clear.

We're not beholden to advertisers in any way and our conclusions are entirely independent of the views of manufacturers, musicians and distributors.

When you read about a bass-related product here, you know you're getting a sensible, balanced review from an experienced bass tester. Value for money is at the top of our agenda in these cash-strapped times, but on the other hand, we believe in paying for quality.

Right, that's enough from me. Remember, this is just about the only place that it's good to have GAS!*

Joel McIver, editor

*GAS = Gear Acquisition Syndrome (a malaise often suffered by bass players)

£1295 50

ARIA RSB-1500/M

£629 52

FRET-KING BLACK LABEL ESPRIT

£1350 54

WILLCOX LIGHTWAVE SABER HEXFX

$700, £399, $299 56

PHIL JONES BASS BP-800 HEAD, C27 AND C47 CABS

£429 58

SEYMOUR DUNCAN FOOZ ANALOG FUZZ SYNTHESIZER

£105-£400 59

FLIGHTCASE ROUNDUP

ARIA
RSB-1500/M

With the company's rich history of desirable instruments in mind, Mike Brooks finds out if Aria's new four-string fulfils its Eastern promise

The Great British Bass Lounge
www.greatbritishbasslounge.com

£1295

A company with an enviable history, Aria were a desirable brand throughout the Eighties, and models from that period are still avidly sought after – but for several decades, the company has struggled to repeat their earlier success. This particular model may not resemble Aria's classic Super Bass range – but with a quilted maple top and caramel burst finish, it certainly has premium visuals. Just what do you get for your £1300?

Build Quality

Added to its ash body and quilted maple top, the RSB-1500's rounded body curves, elongated top horn and extensive cutaways make for a sizeable body, very similar to the Super Bass models of old. Minimal chamfering on the upper bout is compensated for by deep contouring to the rear of the body, while the lower cutaway permits full access to all 24 frets.

The neck pocket is tight and the one-piece maple neck is securely attached using a six-bolt system. Regarding balance, there is some headstock bias – highlighted by the way the instrument hangs across the player's body – but placed on a strap, the bass sits comfortably. The maple neck feels long, despite its standard 34" scale length; the body length and top horn contribute to this impression. Thankfully, the neck sports a slim D-shaped profile, while the broad maple fingerboard and 19mm string spacing make it comfortable and easy to navigate.

The setup on our review model is professional, with no sharp fret edges, and the action and the 40mm nut width make the bass very playable. Chrome Gotoh hardware works well against the caramel burst finish while the volume, balance, bass and treble controls turn smoothly, as do the machine heads. A pair of Aria single-coil pickups and 9-volt active two-band EQ circuit complete the electronics package.

Sounds And Playability

Pan across each pickup and you'll hear a useful spread of tones. As expected, the neck unit is far rounder than the bridge pickup, but at no point does the neck unit sound unclear; you'll require very little bass boost if you choose to solo that pickup. Moving across to the bridge unit, a crisp, detailed honk is achievable with ease, but you may find it useful to add treble EQ in small amounts until you find the clarity you're looking for.

Surprisingly, the treble control is quite reserved and polite – I was expecting a more glassy response. With both pickups in operation and the balance control set in the middle, the bass bounces along nicely across the frequency range. The bass EQ is thunderous, so I would definitely advise caution when boosting those frequencies. Pick players may find that the bass boost rounds out their tone, despite the initial string attack that a pick provides. The single-coils' bright tonal performance works well with the darker tones provided by the ash body. Rock players, and anyone else looking for a full-bodied bass response, will certainly enjoy the tones that this bass has to offer. Fingerstyle players will find that it ticks many boxes for them too, but slappers and tappers may feel that it lacks a little definition in the upper register.

Playability certainly isn't in question here; the Aria's body depth and broad fingerboard make playing comfortable and fretting intuitive. The strings feel tight under tension, but their tone is distinct and clear.

Conclusion

This bass is solidly built and will no doubt prove a reliable stalwart for live gigging – just what you would expect of an Aria instrument. It isn't lacking in the looks department either, but you might reasonably expect a little more for its pricetag. The components do a fine job and the bass has useable tones, but the sounds you can coax from it lack the stardust you might reasonably expect. Still, check one out; glitter isn't everything.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Aria RSB-1500/M
Price | £1295
Made In | Japan
Colour | Caramel burst, gloss finish
Body | Ash with quilted maple top
Neck | One-piece maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, six-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 40mm
Fingerboard | Maple
Frets | 24
Pickups | Aria AJJ-1 single-coil pickups x 2
Electronics | Active 9-volt, two-band EQ
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, bass, treble
Hardware | Chrome hardware, Gotoh J510SJ bridge, Gotoh GB1 machine heads
Weight | 3.9kg
Case/gig bag included | Gigbag
Left-hand option available | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Fine tones and playability
Minus | Will it stand out?
Overall | An interesting bass from a legendary company

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	■■■■■■■□□□
SOUND QUALITY	■■■■■■■□□□
VALUE	■■■■■■■□□□

FRET-KING
Black Label Esprit

Don't fret; king of luthiers Trev Wilkinson never does. Joel McIver picks up his latest jagged-edged Esprit

JHS
www.jhs.co.uk

£629

Cars and wine are always useful analogies when reviewing bass guitars, we find. A £5000 instrument is comparable to a Ferrari F40 or 1956 Château d'Yquem. A £100 bass can be likened to a 1989 Mazda or a £2.99 merlot from Lidl. You get the picture… but just to confuse the issue, here's a bass with a pricetag that says '2018 Volkswagen', that has the looks of a 1960s Camaro and the feel of a 1970s Mercedes. What's your simile-fixated reviewer to do?

Build Quality

The Esprit's bodyshape is a love-it-or-hate-it affair, especially when combined with that pearlescent-effect scratchplate and vintage gold controls. We think it's rather cool, perhaps invigorated by the observation of a certain G. Lee elsewhere in this magazine that a lot of vintage bass design was inspired by mid-20th century accordions. The headstock is a bit of a lump, though, and with those chunky elephant-ear tuners from Wilkinson on board there's the tiniest bit of headstock dive – not enough to get stressed about, though.

The bridge is pretty standard and the fine details are just as you'd expect, but the pickup is a curious affair called a WJM double coil. Fret-King describe the unit with a refreshing absence of modesty as a "Wilkinson masterpiece… a profound and powerful pickup which will hold its own in every musical style." Sounds promising.

Sounds And Playability

Turn the ignition (or pop the cork, if you prefer) with the passive EQ set at halfway, and the Esprit immediately comes at you with a crunchy, pleasant tone. You might want to roll it off towards the bass end for a bit more thump, as the sound is lean and slightly toppy even before you start messing around with the other tone control, labelled the 'Vari-coil'.

Even if the bass had only one EQ option, it would still enjoy one of the most useful ranges we've come across for its relatively measly cost. Tweak the Vari-coil anyway and see what it does; it seems to be essentially about adding some punch in the mids. It does this well, but frankly it's not really needed; the basic tone is good enough.

The Esprit is easy to play for those prone to aching picking hands, because your arm rests on the extended upper bout. Gibson Explorer players have known about this for decades. The 22-fret, Precision-y neck somehow feels longer than its 34" scale would suggest (no bad thing) and is easily navigated thanks to its slinky rear finish. This, combined with a super-low action on the review model, is a relief – the hefty Esprit would be a bit of a workout otherwise.

Conclusion

This is that desirable product, a bass guitar with potential that belies its pricetag. It's a highly enjoyable low-mid-market instrument as far as we're concerned. As for cars and wine, let's mix metaphors. This bass combines classic taste with a modern engine. You'll enjoy the Esprit experience from either viewpoint.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £629
Made In | India
Body | Alder
Neck | Maple, 34" scale
Neck Join | Bolt-on
Fingerboard | Ebony, 22 frets
Pickups | Fret-King Platinum Series WJM
Controls | Volume, tone, Vari-Coil
Hardware | Wilkinson chrome tuners and bridge
Weight | 4.3kg / 9.5 lbs
Left-hand available | No
Gigbag/case included | Luxury carry bag

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Unique look; very playable neck; good tone range
Minus | None
Overall | For £600 and change, this is a whole lotta bass

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

WILLCOX
Lightwave Saber HexFX

Contemporary looks and styling, modern technology and sounds to match? Mike Brooks asks if the Saber's futuristic claims are true

Bass Direct
www.bassdirect.co.uk

£1350

We applaud innovation here at *BGM*, and we loved the last Lightwave Saber bass – an SL5 fretless – when we reviewed it back in September 2011. Still, technology moves along at a rapid rate, and eight years later who knows what extra digital witchcraft lies under the bonnet of this new Saber, the HexFX? At £1350, the instrument is within the grasp of many players – so let's see how this latest incarnation performs.

Build Quality

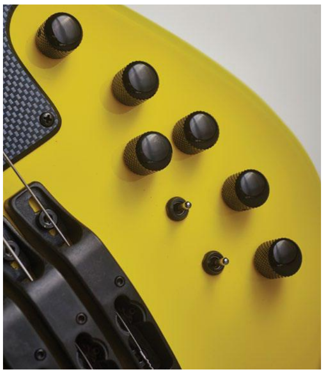
The HexFX's angular, futuristically shaped body is built from solid alder. It lacks contouring to the front or rear of the body, but on the upside its Highlight Yellow colouring and gloss polyurethane finish set it off a treat. A graphite scratchplate adds to the modern vibe, while deep cutaways offer unhindered access to all 24 frets. The level of finishing is professional, with a fine string action and no sharp fret ends anywhere on the neck.

With monorail Icetone-equipped bridge saddles for each string forming the Graphtech Monolithic bridge system, the instrument's sleek appearance isn't compromised. A mono jack output socket is situated along the edge of the lower body bout, along with a 13-pin DIN connector which allows full MIDI and synth access to make full use of the bass's capabilities.

The control setup may look a little daunting (just look at that spec!) but if you don't make use of the MIDI capabilities, one switch and one control become redundant anyway. Flipping the bass over reveals a large backplate which hides the processing circuitry, while an additional socket on the body edge allows the bass to charge up, courtesy of a charge pack, so that the optical pickups, piezo and active circuit all function.

Sounds And Playability

Now for the clever part. Instead of traditional magnetic pickups, the HexFX has an optical pickup system, which uses infrared sensors housed in the bridge to 'see' the string vibrating without affecting its motion or



performance. This provides a transparent signal, implying that a pure, accurate and natural bass sound will be the result.

The bass has a good resonant response before being amplified, so plugging in, what do we have? The tone is quite something – clear and precise, resonating strongly and with substantial sustain. Accurate fretting and damping are important, as every nuance of the strings' movement is conveyed, meaning even string noise and mistakes are amplified.

String volume is even across all four strings and string resonance is projected accurately. Getting to grips with the EQ is relatively simple; the bass EQ fattens up the naturally bright tone, which is particularly useful in a band context, while the brighter tones work well for soloing. The mid-EQ is very noticeable when boosted or cut, and sweeping across the mid-frequencies shows considerable variation.

You may wonder why there is no treble control. This is where the Icetone blend comes into play; inside each bridge unit is an additional piezo pickup, which provides clear, detailed top end. This unit highlights increased articulation and detail elements, but on its own, it may not supply enough functional thunder for most players' requirements.

Essentially, you have a choice between the optical Lightwave pickups, the piezo pickups or a combination of the two. Some players will like this, some won't. Experimentation is called for to find the tones you're after.

The bass is comfortable to wear and play; there is some minor headstock bias, but the overall balance is good. The three-piece maple neck, finished in satin polyurethane, boasts a sleek, slippery feel and alongside the standard 19mm string spacing, 40mm nut width and slim C-shaped neck profile, the neck as a whole feels very familiar. A chunky brute this is not.

Conclusion

As a fretless, I can see many advantages to this high-functioning bass. I'm less convinced by it fretted, but I can't deny its clear tonal performance – and once you get used to having nowhere to place your thumb, it's a real joy to play.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £1350
Made In | Indonesia
Colour | Highlight yellow, gloss polyurethane finish
Body | Alder
Neck | Three-piece maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 40mm
Fingerboard | Rosewood
Frets | 24
Pickups | Lightwave analogue optical pickup
Electronics | Lightwave designed active pre-amp
Controls | Volume, bass boost/cut, middle boost/cut, mid-sweep, Icetone blend, MIDI volume control, wet/dry toggle switch, program selector switch
Hardware | Black hardware, custom Graphtech Monolithic bridge with Icetone saddles, die-cast machine heads
Weight | 3.5kg
Case/gig bag included | Gigbag
Left-hand option available | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A well thought-out solution to MIDI triggering
Minus | A little complicated for some players
Overall | Great ideas in one package – and a great bass in its own right

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

PHIL JONES BASS

BP-800 head, C27 and C47 cabs

It's that bass maverick Jones again, back with more luxurious amps for Rod C Taylor's road-test

Phil Jones Bass (BP-800 and C27)
www.pjbworld.com

Selectron (C47)
http://selectron-uk.co.uk

$700, £399, $299

In the world of bass gear, the name Phil Jones has long been associated with packing surprising power into small units. From their Double Four miniature practice amp, which features two 4" NeoPower speakers, to their C9 cabinets, which has nine 5" woofers, this company has repeatedly demonstrated that you can get huge sound out of speakers that would be unimposing if judged by size alone.

This was not always the case. Until the early 2000s, the Phil Jones company concerned itself mostly with audio acoustics and loudspeaker design, but after spending a number of years in the field of high-end general audio, Jones found his way back to his first love, the bass, and we're all the better for it. The new BP-800 head and C27 and C47 they sent to us for a test-drive prove that point, providing an incredibly compact but powerful rig that delivers beautifully in terms of tone, depth, and resilience.

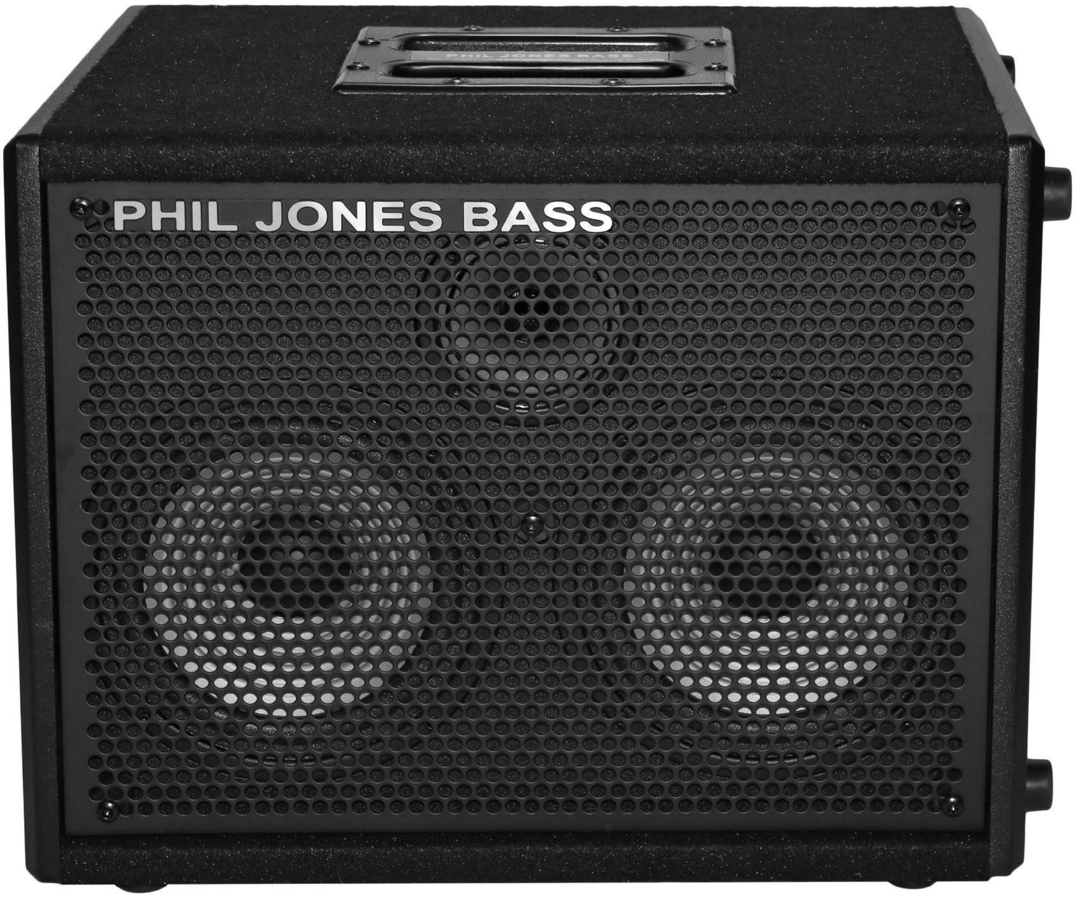
I usually start out testing gear by putting it through the paces in my home studio before taking it out around town, but this time I decided to do the reverse. The day the gear arrived, I had a rehearsal that same evening with Nashville powerhouse Ashley Cleveland and a group of singer-songwriters she was preparing for a show; I was part of the house band. The venue featured a small stage and a room that sat about 125 – the perfect kind of space to try out this setup.

I stacked the C27 on the C47, which seemed to make the most sense to me, and hooked up the amp. For this gig, I was playing two different basses; a passive American Fender Jazz and a custom active Zon Sonus fretless. These basses produce substantially different sounds, so I was curious to see how much tweaking I had to do as I switched between them.

Turns out, not much. Set straight up, the BP800 very accurately represents the instrument in your hands, which is a big deal to players like me who invest a lot of time and money in choosing particular instruments for their unique tonal qualities. With the Fender, I ran it straight up all night. For the Zon, I tweaked it minutely to add a few more mids, since I tend to solo the bridge pickup quite a bit. Overall, this combination pleased me, the artists, and the sound guy. You can't ask for much more, right? I should mention that loading it in was a breeze, too. It's not that the cabinets are light, but rather that their size makes them simple to handle when moving them from house to car to stage.

Back home, I put the amp and cabs through their paces with the above two instruments, along with a Spector EuroLX 4 and 6, an Xotic ProVintage 5, a Fender P-Bass and a Roscoe Beck V. Each performed well through the rig, but I was most impressed with how good the

> **"OVERALL, THIS COMBINATION PLEASED ME, THE ARTISTS, AND THE SOUND GUY. YOU CAN'T ASK FOR MUCH MORE, RIGHT?"**



five-strings sounded, their tones delivered with the same deep, meaty, growly lows I'd expect from larger speakers. When I got to the Xotic, I turned up the active bass EQ all the way, cranked the volume, and hammered away on the B string to see if I could get my neighbour to come out of his house to see what was going on. (He did, but we're friends so it's all good.)

In short, I was impressed not only with the volume the amp produced at low frequencies, but also with how, at that volume, there was no breakup, no squeezed tone, and nothing else to indicate that the amp was being stressed by how hard and low I was pushing it. Add in the thoughtful design, light weight and aesthetics of the amp, and you have a winning combination. For example, I dig the simple but effective five-band EQ, and I especially like the Mute Passive/Active switch. It's important to me that something clearly indicates when the mute feature is engaged on an amp, but instead of adding a whole other light just for that, Phil Jones makes use of the clip indicator, which stays lit when you engage the switch to mute the amp. It's the little things that matter, right?

All in all, I love this setup. So many of our gigs as bassists are on tight stages where big rigs don't make much sense, but in those moments we don't want to go with a small sound just to conserve space. The Phil Jones BP800 amp, paired with the C27 and C47, solves that problem. Vincent Van Gogh once said "Great things are done by a series of small things brought together." This setup provides a wonderful example of the truth of that statement, and I encourage you to give it a try to see for yourself.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Phil Jones PJB BP800 Head

Price | $700 (currently available in US only)
Made in | China
Power | 800 watts @ 4 ohms, 400 watts @ 8 ohms
Features | Input, Mute/Low/High switch, five-band EQ (Lo-Bass, Hi-Bass, Mid, Lo-Treble, Hi-Treble), clip indicator, AUX in, headphones out, input level control, AUX level control, master volume, effects send/return, XLR DI with ground lift, Speakon out, preamp out
Size | 7.5" x 12.5" x 2.5" (190mm x 317mm x 63 mm) W x D x H
Weight | 5.7 lbs / 2.59 kg

Phil Jones PJB Cab-47

Price | £399
Power | 300 watts at 8 ohms
Speakers | 4 x 7" baffle mounted drivers, 3" tweeter
Inputs | 2 x Speakon inputs
Size | 16.3" x 12.6" x 17" (414mm x 320mm x 431mm), W x D x H
Weight | 38.6lbs / 17.5 kg

Phil Jones PJB Cab-27

Price | $299, including PJB cover (currently available in US only)
Power | 200 watts at 8 ohms
Speakers | 2 x 7" baffle mounted drivers, 3" tweeter
Inputs | 2 x Speakon inputs
Size | 13" x 16" x 13" (330 x 460 x 330 mm) W x D x H
Weight | 19lbs / 13.1 kg

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Beautifully transparent amp and cabs, perfect for small to medium gigs
Minus | None
Overall | If you're looking for a compact but powerful rig, you'll want to give this one a try

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

SEYMOUR DUNCAN

Fooz Analogue Fuzz Synthesizer

A fuzz, filter and tremolo in one? Jonathan Herrera steps up for a game of Fooz-ball

Rosetti
www.rosetti.co.uk

£429

Despite the fact that Seymour Duncan has been designing stompboxes and effects for over a decade, most bass players only ever encounter Duncan's wares in their hunt for an aftermarket pickup. My guess is that the oddly-named Fooz will go far to broaden the brand's pedal pedigree in bass players' minds.

Seymour Duncan calls the Fooz an 'Analog Fuzz Synthesizer', three words that, when grouped together, I find especially interesting given the direction my musical tastes are evolving in these days. Imagine my dismay, then, when I realized that there's no synthesis lying within the pedal's sturdy metal chassis. To be a true synthesizer, the Fooz would have to be capable of generating sounds of its own. It doesn't do that. Rather, it offers a trio of effects and a variety of modulation sources in order to deliver a variety of synth-like sounds.

The Fooz is a fuzz, filter, and tremolo pedal in one. Its synth-y character stems from the fact that many synth sounds make use of filters, amplitude envelopes, and LFOs to help shape sound. The Fooz Fuzz is also integral, since a fuzz pedal's clipping action transforms audio into a square-ish wave, much like the square wave oscillator common to most synths. On the Fooz, the degree of clipping is controlled with the Gain knob, while the Level control is the pedal's overall output. A small on/off switch engages the Duncan's robust LFO-based tremolo, which offers players control over the LFO's Depth, Speed, Wave, and Shape, which in this case is something akin to the LFO's duty cycle. Also subject to LFO control is the Fooz's switchable multi-mode (bandpass and lowpass) filter.

Freq controls the cutoff, while Resonance adds amplitude at the cutoff, just like your average synth. A three-position switch is on hand to govern the filter's modulation source between ENV (an onboard envelope follower with Sensitivity control) or the aforementioned LFO. If an expression pedal is attached to the provided 1/4" jack, it can be used to govern a number of parameters set by the rear-panel dipswitches. Importantly, the Duncan's LFO can also be set via tap-tempo, thanks to a robust footswitch.

A comprehensive look at each of the Fooz's many possible sounds is outside the scope here, but it suffices to say that Duncan's latest design offers a multitudinous array of classic and exotic funky, fuzzy, and filtered sounds to players disciplined enough to find each parameter's sweet spot. It isn't an easy pedal to quickly grasp, though, so the less ambitious among you should look elsewhere. Its singular blend of tremolo, fuzz and filter is unlike anything on the market, and each effect's interactivity makes serendipitous 'woah' moments a near-inevitability.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £429
Made in | USA
Features | LFO: depth, speed, wave, shape; Fuzz: Level, Gain, Trem on/off switch; Filter: Freq, Resonance, LPF/off/BPF switch, ENV/off/LFO control type switch; Bypass and Tap Tempo controls; 1/4" input, output, and expression jacks
Dimensions | 143 x 127 x 57mm (5.6 x 5 x 2.5"), W x H x D
Weight | 595g (21 oz)
Power | 9V DC

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Freaky blend of powerful fuzz, filter, and tremolo effects
Minus | A little counterintuitive for those disinclined to tweak heavily
Overall | A unique sonic mangler that would be a welcome addition to many a pedalboard

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

1 | Gator GPE-Bass-TSA £105
A budget option that's tough with lockable latches

2 | SKB 1SKB 44 Case Bass Guitar £110
(PRO version £140)
Heavy duty and solid, with rounded corners and sturdy lockable latches.

3 | RockCase RC10805B Flightcase £120
PVC-coated plywood with aluminium edges and rounded chrome corners, plus a substantial foam lining inside.

4 | Hiscox STD-EBS Case £135
Lightweight, easy to carry and a lockable latch. I've personally had one driven over, and some plastic was shattered but the instrument was unscathed inside… so it works.

5 | RockCase RC ABS 10505 BW/SB £140
ABS plastic but metal reinforced; ergonomically shaped with internal foam protection and lockable latches.

6 | SKB 1SKB-44RW ATA Bass Guitar Safe £150
Used by none other than Nathan East; place your bass in your own gig bag, insert in the case and lock up.

7 | Gator GTSA-GTRBASS-LED £200
Moulded polyethylene case, lockable with neck support and good storage space for accessories.

8 | SKB 3i-5014-OP Bass Guitar Case £250
A serious case; wheels, lockable latches, two handles and water resistant. A hefty price, but a hefty case to boot.

9 | Gator GWP-Bass £400
Impact-proof resin shell; powerclaw latching system; sprung handle; recessed wheels. A major outlay, but what's not to like?

Learning To Fly

Taking your bass on a plane? Invest in one of these hard cases, says Mike Brooks

Flying with an instrument is laden with pitfalls, problems and general grief. It should be straightforward, but the internet is full of photos provided by hapless souls for whom the process ended in tears, insurance claims and instruments in tatters.

I recently took an early flight to Berlin for a corporate event. Having had many… memorable experiences with airlines and their varying musical instrument policies, I use a headless Status Streamline bass for all work requiring flights. Its size and dimensions are ideal; although it's a little longer than most hand baggage restrictions allow, it sits perfectly in overhead baggage lockers. However, on this occasion the airline informed me that after a recent situation involving a famous acoustic guitar-toting singer-songwriter, their company policy was for all instruments to be checked in as baggage, with no instruments allowed in the cabin.

A stand-off ensued, but they weren't budging – so I was forced to head to the Oversize Baggage counter and have my gig-bagged instrument packed in cardboard boxes with bubble wrap. Thankfully the bass made it there and back unscathed, but the story highlights an all-too-common issue. Basses are probably going to be consigned to the baggage hold from now on, and hence subject to the tender mercies of baggage handlers.

With this in mind, we've decided to search out nine of the best hard case solutions, covering a range of prices. In the main, we've gone for moulded plastic cases instead of hardshell cases that may offer less protection from being crushed or driven over. That's not to say plastic cases are fail-safe – they aren't! – but they offer a higher degree of protection to your bass than the alternatives. Buying the most expensive case doesn't necessarily guarantee your instrument a trouble-free journey, of course, so consider insurance as an extra, as well as leaving your favourite bass at home and flying with a less cherished one instead.

Needless to say, prices differ from retailer to retailer, and deals are available online for those who shop around. Remember to take the model of your bass into consideration, as some cases are internally shaped for specific models. Safe travels!

BASS TUITION

Making you a better bass player

Welcome to our tuition section, in which *Bass Guitar Magazine* collates the wit and wisdom of the *crème de la crème* of the electric and upright bass world. We're fortunate enough to have some serious talent on the team, from world-class music educators to experienced touring musicians, who between them have laid down the low notes in every studio, club and arena in the civilised world. Note that we've divided the columns according to Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced level for easy reference. Whether you're looking to improve your playing technique, expand your awareness of theory, set up your rig to sound like your particular bass hero or simply get on a bus and tour, we provide the answers you need here. What are you waiting for? Dive in...

Joel McIver, editor

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here!

Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across almost two decades' of touring and an ever-growing catalogue of solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for over two decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?

www.stevelawson.net

STEVE LAWSON

Beginners | 66

Now you're rolling with theory and techniques, it's time to hit the next level

Philip Mann studied at the London College of Music, securing bachelor's and master's degrees in performance before receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. Endorsed by Overwater and Vanderkley, he's now a busy international freelancing electric and double bassist. His performance and session credits include work with double Grammy Award-winning guitarist Albert Lee, five-time Grammy Award nominee Hunter Hayes, Deep Purple's Steve Morse, Billy Bragg and country artist Peter Donegan. He has featured as a solo demonstration artist at the London Bass Guitar Show every year since 2012 and is currently a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School while also lecturing for Scott's Bass Lessons.

PHIL MANN

Intermediate | 70

Take the bass world by storm with the ultimate tuition section

Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer and transcriber since 2002, working in function bands, cruise ship gigs, theatre shows and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with legendary Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer and has worked for *BGM* since its first issue. Since 2007 Stuart has worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol, where he continues to teach all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for legendary bassists such as Mark King, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm, Bernard Edwards, Stuart Zender and John Entwistle, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

STUART CLAYTON

Advanced | 76

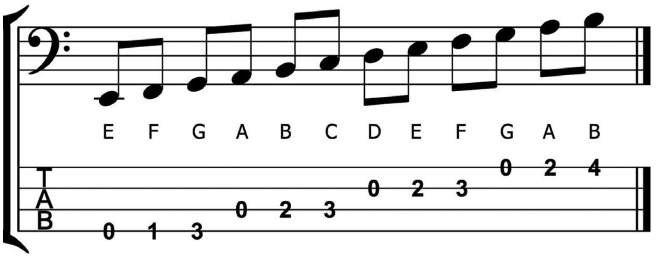
BGM Notation Legend

The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in *Bass Guitar Magazine*

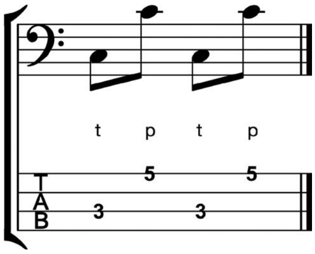
The Stave: most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.

Tablature: this is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.

Notes shown in brackets indicate that a note has been tied over from a previous bar.

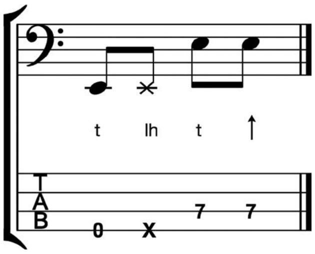


PLAYING TECHNIQUES



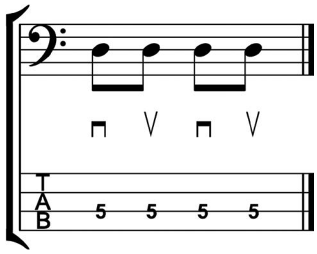
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a ‘t’, notes popped with the fingers marked with a ‘p’



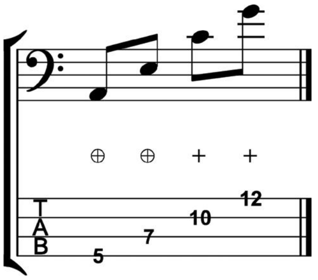
ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE

Fretting hand slaps are marked ’lh’ and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow



PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

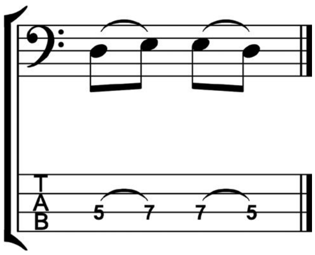
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up)



TAPPING TECHNIQUES

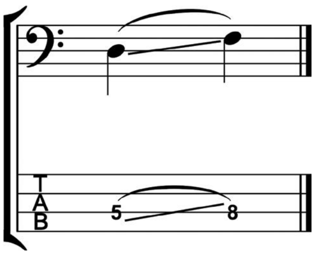
Fretting hand taps are shown with a ‘+’ in a circle. Picking hand taps are shown with ‘+’. Specific fingers will be shown with numbers if necessary

FRETTING TECHNIQUES



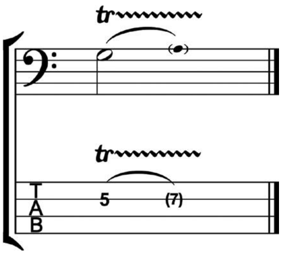
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF

Hammer-ons and pull-offs are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand



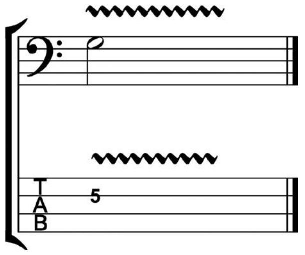
SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

Slides are performed by playing the first note then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note



TRILLS

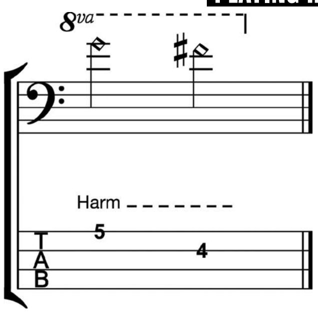
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown using hammer-ons and pull-offs



VIBRATO

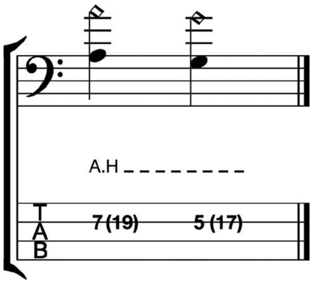
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger

PLAYING HARMONICS



NATURAL HARMONICS

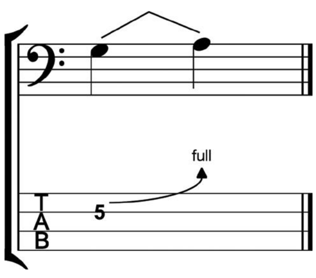
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated



ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

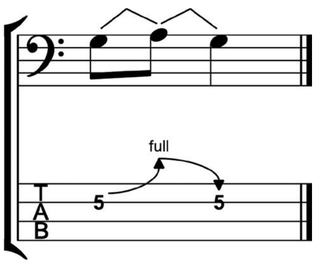
Pluck the string while fretting the lower note and placing the edge of the picking hand thumb an octave higher (the note shown in brackets)

BENDING NOTES



BEND

The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ = semitone, full = tone



BEND AND RELEASE

The note is bent up to the interval indicated then released back to its original pitch

THE FRONT LINE

Want to make it as a professional bassist? Listen up as *BGM*'s world-class bass team reports back from the tourbus

THE JAZZ BASSIST

RUTH GOLLER

Jazz warrior Ruth gets percussive

I've started playing in a new project called Warmer Than Blood, led by my friend, guitarist Chris Montague. He used to have a band called Troyka that some of you might know, and was also part of Squarepusher's band Shobaleader One. Chris has written some brilliant new music which was originally designed for a quartet consisting of guitar, drums, piano and electric bass. We did some rehearsals with a couple of drummers, but then practised as a trio without drums. As we were getting our heads round the music, it became obvious that we were arranging the music and developing the band to be drumless.

Suddenly we had so many more dynamics to play with, especially with the acoustic piano. By preparing our instruments to produce the percussive sounds that we were missing we discovered a unique sound as a band. I've pushed the gain on my Sansamp pedal so that the sound I'm getting is quite distorted. At the same time I'm using quite a low amp volume, while trying to keep enough bottom end in the sound. Kit Downes, our pianist, has modded his piano with magnets and screws, especially on the low strings, to get some fantastic percussive sounds. Chris has equipped his guitar with paper and crocodile clips.

Because we all play in so many different projects, rehearsals are rare, which is a shame, as it's crucial to get deeply into fine-tuning a band's sound. However, we all live very close together, so we've managed to get together frequently to work on the band's sound by incorporating extended techniques and ensemble playing. We're embracing the extra space you can get from playing without drums.

Time-keeping is tricky; obviously a drummer would usually be responsible for a lot of that side of things. For me as the bass player, it's been a useful reminder about relying on my own time and trying to be responsible for it within the trio. It's hard to push in front of the beat if you don't actually have a beat – try it for yourself, it's a useful exercise!

www.ruthgoller.com

THE METALHEAD

DANIEL FIRTH

Ear we go, says Cradle Of Filth's bassist Dan

One of the most useful and coveted talents in a musician is the ability to pick up music by ear and quickly translate that into playing. Some of us appear to have a natural ability for it, while others don't. For the most part, it simply comes down to training your ear – and when the pressure is on, it's an invaluable skill to have.

Leonardo Treviño

If you feel that your ears could use some improvement, try concentrating on working parts out without relying on resources such as tabs or videos. In my early days of playing guitar I often went straight to online tabs, and although they can be useful, much of what's out there isn't accurate. Thankfully, magazines such as the one you're reading are a lot more reliable! I still see them as a potentially useful reference, but one that should be properly scrutinised. If training your ear is your goal, try working something out on your own, then referring to these resources afterwards for comparison.

If you want to make the process a little easier, using software to slow songs down while retaining the original pitch can be very helpful; you can also try to bring the bass out in the mix by giving the bottom end an EQ boost. The more you learn songs this way, the more accurate your ear will become and the faster you'll get at doing it. In my case, the bands I've played bass in have tended to write pretty fast and busy music, which isn't always conducive to picking out my parts from past records. This is what I've usually had to do in preparation for gigs though, especially for Cradle Of Filth, where I perform many old songs that I had no hand in writing.

I certainly don't claim to have an expert ear, but with some perseverance I've come a long way over the years. A somewhat stubborn attitude has helped, as I aim to avoid approximations or simplifications and remain as faithful to the originals as possible. I've found that striving to discern all the various subtleties of a bass track in a busy mix is perfect training for the ear, and it's appreciated by the die-hard fans too!

www.cradleoffilth.com

THE ALTERNATIVE ROCKER

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN

Be ready for your muse to strike, says Therapy?'s Mike

Last year was a great one for me on a personal and playing level, so I'm keen to continue that into 2019. First up I feel I'm in a good place regarding regular gigging and practice, so there's a confidence in my playing which I intend to use in some new creative endeavours. Usually I like to hit the floor running at the start of any year to fine-tune and document any musical ideas or song concepts I've had previously floating around. This involves going through various notebooks, phone recordings and half finished demos to find the original ideas – and then trying to remember the actual parts. Once I have a batch of them together I work them up into passable demos with a drum program and some guitar parts, before popping them into my cunningly-named 'New Songs 2019' folder. It feels good to have a bunch of stuff reasonably ready to go when the time comes to hit the studio or begin work on a new album.

In addition to this I have a project called the '30 Day Challenge' where I try to come up with – and demo – a new musical idea every day for a whole month. Now, I know what you may be thinking – you can't just force it out! True, but I feel that getting into this regular creative mindset works wonders. There's no need to sit around for the muse to strike; it's better to treat your creativity like a muscle and give it a regular workout. Even if only 10 percent of those ideas you come up with get used, you'll still have some solid ideas as opposed to none. Keep your bass handy as well, because the aforementioned muse can pop up without warning. Stick it on a wall hanger near your desk/sofa/bed; that way you'll be more likely to pick it up when you have an idea. Make sure you have your preferred recording device to hand, too; the voice memo app on my phone is a godsend. You'll feel a lot better knowing that you've been keeping your chops up and banking some cool musical ideas.

www.therapyquestionmark.co.uk

THE TV STAR

DAVE SWIFT

Be versatile, advises Jools Holland's bassist Swifty

At the end of 2018 I toured the UK with Jools Holland and Marc Almond, as well as recording an album with them. On top of that, in December I found myself rehearsing at the BBC for our annual New Year's Eve Hootenanny TV show. I was playing with Michael Bublé, Jesse Glynn, Yola Carter, Ruby Turner, Marc Almond and Junior Giscombe. Luckily, I've had decades of experience playing jazz, big band, pop, funk, rock, soul, blues and R&B, so I was prepared. Many bassists choose just one genre of music to play, and are highly successful doing so. However, in their early careers even the most accomplished of them will have spent some time playing lots of different music and acquiring different skills. For regular, jobbing bass players, versatility is crucial to getting work.

Nile Rogers and Chic are playing on our TV show this year, but Nile is using his own bassist, Jerry Barnes. Before I knew Jerry was involved, I was worried about how I was going to approach playing 'Le Freak' and 'Good Times'. Should I play the original versions by the late Bernard Edwards, or go with Jerry's flamboyant, predominantly slapped lines? I played slap bass a lot in the 80s, but since getting the Jools gig, no artist I've worked for (with the exception of Barry White, back in the 90s) has requested that style. As a result, I put the technique out to pasture long ago, and focused on other aspects of my playing.

My dilemma disappeared once I knew Jerry was on the case, but it did make me consider what I would've done if Nile had wanted me to play slap. Of course I would have obliged and worked hard to resurrect my slap chops. Whatever the gig requires, it's my job to deliver it.

Be as versatile as you can, keep an open mind, and embrace and study all kinds of music. You can specialise further down the line, but on your way up, diversify to your heart's content and enrich your musical life!

www.daveswiftbass.com

MUSIC TRUMP(ET)S WAR

Once upon a time, there was a man with a trumpet. And when he was a soldier in the US Army landing on the beaches of Normandy, he kept it by his side. Once, when he was standing guard at night, his captain told him: "Don't play tonight, there's a sharpshooter out there." But our man thought: "That guy out there is just as scared and lonely as me. I'll play a piece for him." The next day, a POW was brought into the camp, and he asked: "Who is the trumpeter that played 'Lili Marleen' last night? When I heard that song, the war was over for me - I just couldn't use my gun any more." The man with the trumpet was called Jack Leroy Tueller. And though it may sound like a fairy tale, this is a true story. A story only music can write.

THE POWER OF MUSIC!

thomann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

STEVE LAWSON

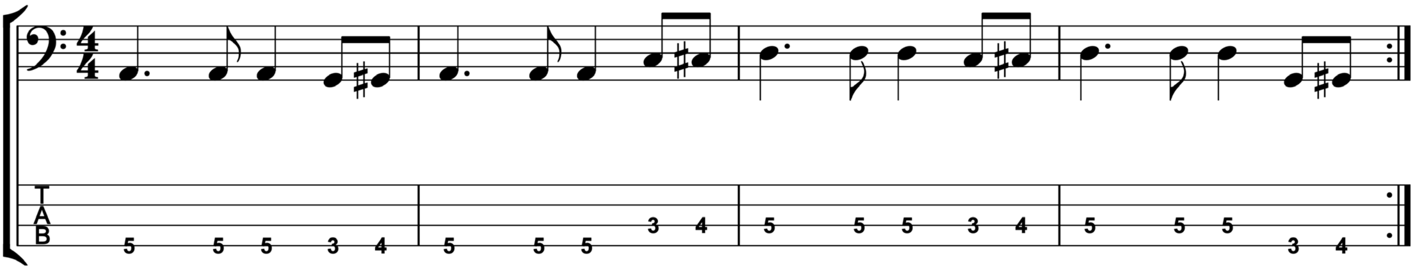
Beginners' Tutorial

Chromatic lines in a beginners' lesson? Just relax and go with Steve Lawson's impeccably even flow

Hello again! This month we're going to step away from patterns formed from scale and chords, and look at some ways we can use chromatic lines to join up the roots of chords. The word 'chromatic' just means using notes drawn from all 12 notes between a root note and an octave – in other words, on every fret of a bass – rather than sticking to keys and scales, which are defined as subsets of those 12 notes. Most of the patterns we've looked at so far have been drawn from either the major scale (seven notes out of the 12 available) pentatonic patterns (five notes) or triad chord shapes (three notes).

Here, we're going to be looking at approaching the root of a chord with a succession of notes a semitone apart. These can be applied to either major or minor chords, and bring a distinct flavour to a lines. Let's jump straight in, with a line that connects up the roots in an alternating two-chord sequence

Example 1



Four fingers naturally cover three frets in the lower positions. Don't stretch unless you have to

There's nothing explicit in this line to tell us whether it's Major or minor. In fact, the two notes at the end of the second bar walking up to the D are the Major and minor 3rd of the A chord. Here we get to think about the concept of weak and strong beats; if you put a note onto a strong beat, your audience are more likely to hear its intention harmonically, rather than just a melodic journey from one chord-defining note to the next. One and three are the strongest beats, then two and four, and then the off-beats between them. So with those last two notes, we've placed the C on a stronger beat than the C#. That doesn't necessarily mean we can't play it against a Major chord, but it does mean that we're setting up a little tension with that particular chromatic note.

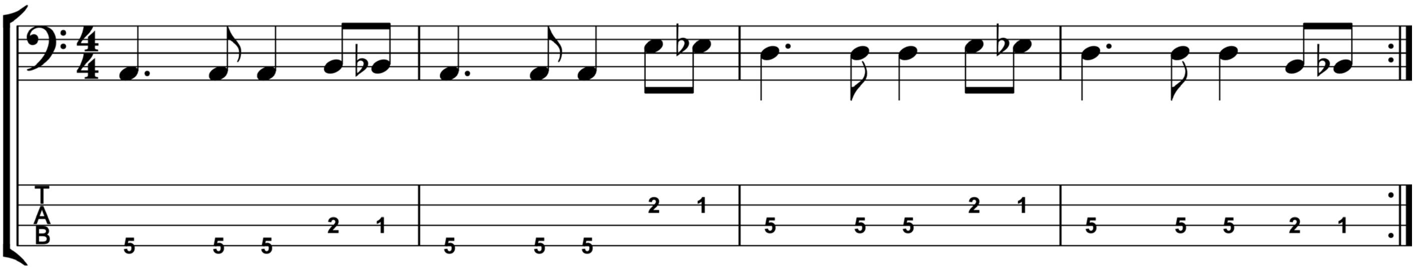
This is one of the single most enjoyable things about building lines from chromatic sequences rather than sticking to chord notes; we get to inject a range of degrees of tension into a line, and as we experiment we can decide how much of that tension we want to include in the song we're working on.

One of my favourite bassists for this kind of playing is Kim Deal, formerly of the Pixies. Have a listen to the track 'Hey' from their masterpiece album *Doolittle*; the entire bass part in the verses is a series of chromatic lines that join up the roots of the chords. The chords themselves are a fairly predictable sequence, but Kim's bass-line brings a whole load of tension and suspense to the line by not thinking about the notes in the key when building her bass-line, but instead just using all the chromatic notes between any pair of chords, and messing with the timing so they land where she wants them.

So we can try out the first bass-line from Example 1 over both A minor to D minor and A Major to D Major, or even A minor to D Major. Each time we change the quality of one or either chords, the degree of tension in the line changes.

Let's try approaching from the other side of the root note – a descending chromatic run:

Example 2



At the 12th fret, one finger per fret is a lot more comfortable

This sounds a little more unusual, right? It's nowhere near as common a pattern as the first one. Here we can consider the line between bass parts that sound like compositions, and parts that are more generic material, perhaps associated with a style, but less likely to come off like we're playing a cover of someone else's song. Sometimes it's the stranger, less common elements in a line that make it recognisable. These can be purely rhythmic; the bass-line of 'Stir It Up' by Bob Marley is just a triad, but its rhythm makes it instantly recognisable. Or take 'Chameleon' by Herbie Hancock, which has one of the most famous chromatic walk-up lines ever; it's the rhythm of the other two notes over each chord that makes the otherwise quite generic chromatic walk recognisable as that particular funk fusion masterpiece.

Reversing the line, and walking down to the root, gives us some scope for playing in a way

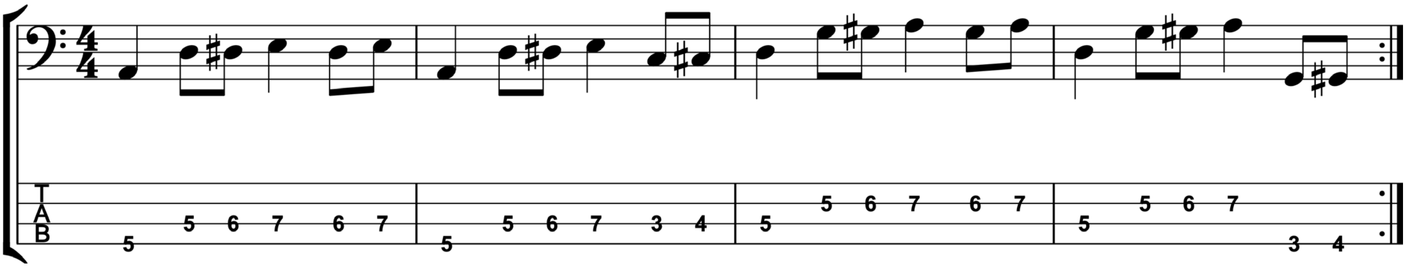
"SOMETIMES IT'S THE STRANGER, LESS COMMON ELEMENTS IN A LINE THAT MAKE IT RECOGNISABLE"

that is less common – and therefore perhaps more fertile ground for writing a line that will stand out as a unique composition in its own right. A big part of the journey towards becoming an effective bass player in a band is acquiring the ability to choose when to make your bass-lines stand out, and the wisdom to judge when it would be better for them to slot into the arrangement and be more felt than heard.

The bassist's role is often paradoxical; we can have a greater impact by being less noticeable. As we build a vocabulary using chromatic notes, it's always worth applying some kind of transformation; try approaching from the other side of the note, or as we're about to try, approaching a different note in the chord, to help give the line a more unusual character.

Let's try the same kind of line but this time we'll approach the fifth. Again, there'll be no information in the bass part that definitely ties it to being major or minor, so we can try it with both sets of chords:

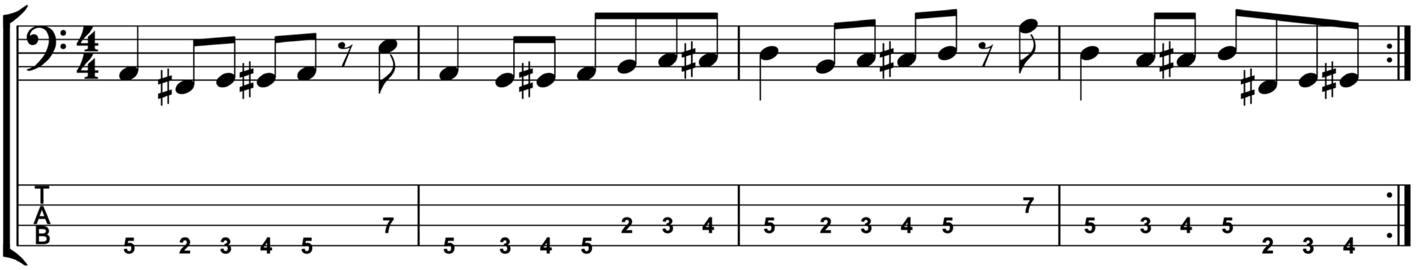
Example 3



Here, using the sharp 4 leading up to the fifth gives a sound that reminds me of 60s TV themes - sort of *Munsters*-ish. Noticing this sort of thing is an important part of building a vocabulary for composing and improvising; associating fragments of technical knowledge about ways of making music with the musical styles and emotions that they correspond to in your head. If you build up a mental library of these associations, then the next time you're thinking 'I really want to write a song about [insert subject]' or coming up with a line for a song that's already written, you can give yourself some creative parameters to narrow down the task for finding a line that fits. We all do this as a matter of course when we play lines that are 'funky' or 'soulful', but there are loads of little harmonic tricks and specific note combinations that can give us a great starting point for spicing up a bass part!

Let's try a four-note chromatic approach. Here, we're definitely in similar territory to the tune we mentioned earlier, 'Chameleon', but we're going to take the generic part and see what we can do with it. Here's one possibility:

Example 4



Here we actually have a mix of four-note and three-note chromatic groupings, just so we can get the line to move smoothly from A to D and back again. The overall effect is of a really cool walking line, which depending on the context could be quite jazzy or soulful – or if you played it with a shuffle, it'd be a pretty quirky blues line! Whatever feel we put on it, we're beginning to hear how chromatic lines can bring all kinds of interesting movement to very simple chord changes, and can hint at different stylistic possibilities that may well influence what the rest of the band are doing as well.

Understanding how a line like this is constructed is one thing, but being able to play it is quite another. There are a number of different ways to approach the fretting hand around lines like this, so let's have a look at some of them.

One of the most commonly taught ways to play chromatic lines is to play each note with a separate finger. Known as playing 'one finger per fret' it's a method that's taught for its accuracy and the option to control each note, as well as the increased possibilities for speed over a line that requires you to shift your hand about a lot. The problem is that in the lower positions, below the fifth fret, it can involve keeping your hand under quite a lot of tension, and can sometimes lead to wrist pain and various aches in your fingers. Allowing your hands to go from a relaxed

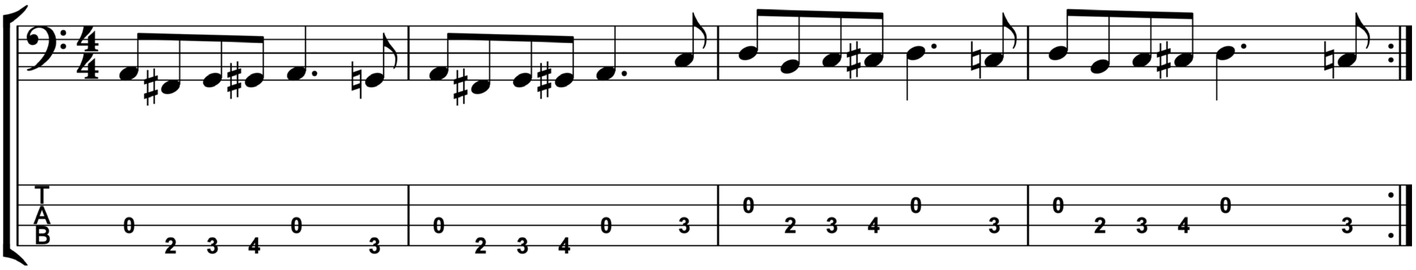
"UNDERSTANDING HOW A LINE LIKE THIS IS CONSTRUCTED IS ONE THING, BUT BEING ABLE TO PLAY IT IS QUITE ANOTHER"

state to a tense state as you press notes down is really important for maintaining blood flow to your muscles – but if your muscles are constantly tense, it restricts blood flow, and that's not good for getting a healthy supply of oxygen to those muscles.

So while one-finger-per-fret does have some advantages for tricky articulation, I'd suggest approaching with caution and abide by the simple rule of 'if it hurts, stop and find someone who can advise on why it hurts and how to stop that from happening'. The kind of ache, or sore fingers, you get after playing bass for longer periods is quite distinct from that burning sensation you get when your technique isn't right and your hand is under too much tension. If you ever feel that, get some help via a reputable bass teacher.

For a more relaxed hand position, we can use four fingers over three frets and allow our third finger (ring finger) to support our little finger rather than having a fret of its own. Let's try the following line with a variety of fingering techniques:

Example 5

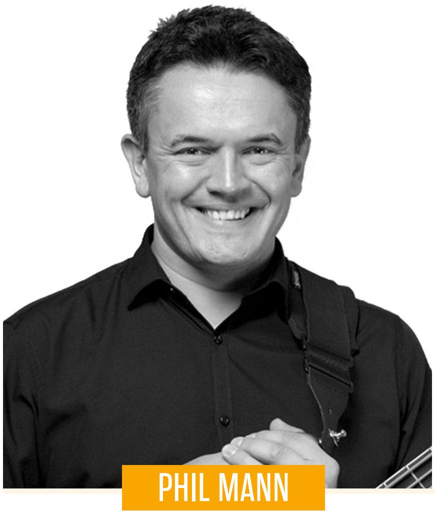


The tab here invites you to use open strings for the A and D, but we can even play a line like this with our index finger playing all four chromatic notes in a row. This only works at slow speed, and it has an impact on how the line is articulated, but there are a lot of situations where that kind of relaxed hand shifting is preferable to an obsessive adherence to a fixed orthodoxy regarding hand positioning.

All of those things need to be weighed up in relation to the context, the impact that our technique has on the way the music sounds, and the amount of energy we expend playing it. Inefficiency is generally bad, but moving your hand up and down the neck isn't necessarily inefficient! So, try Example 5 in a number of ways, beginning with one-finger-per-fret, and see how each of them feels. You don't have to stretch your hand so your four fingers cover all the frets at once; that would be painful. Instead, keep your thumb anchored in the same place on the back of the neck, and allow your hand to pivot slightly to facilitate reaching all the notes. If you move this shape up the neck to play in another key, you'll find that the one-finger-per-fret approach makes way more sense when the distance between four adjacent frets gets closer to the relaxed span of your hand.

As always, experimentation is key, and just to reiterate, if it hurts – stop! Barring that, have fun seeing what kind of interesting lines you can find hidden away in these chromatic approach notes, and be sure to report back next month for more low-end adventures...

If you're shifting your hand to play consecutive notes, keep your hand relaxed and pay attention to any noise made by the shift



PHIL MANN

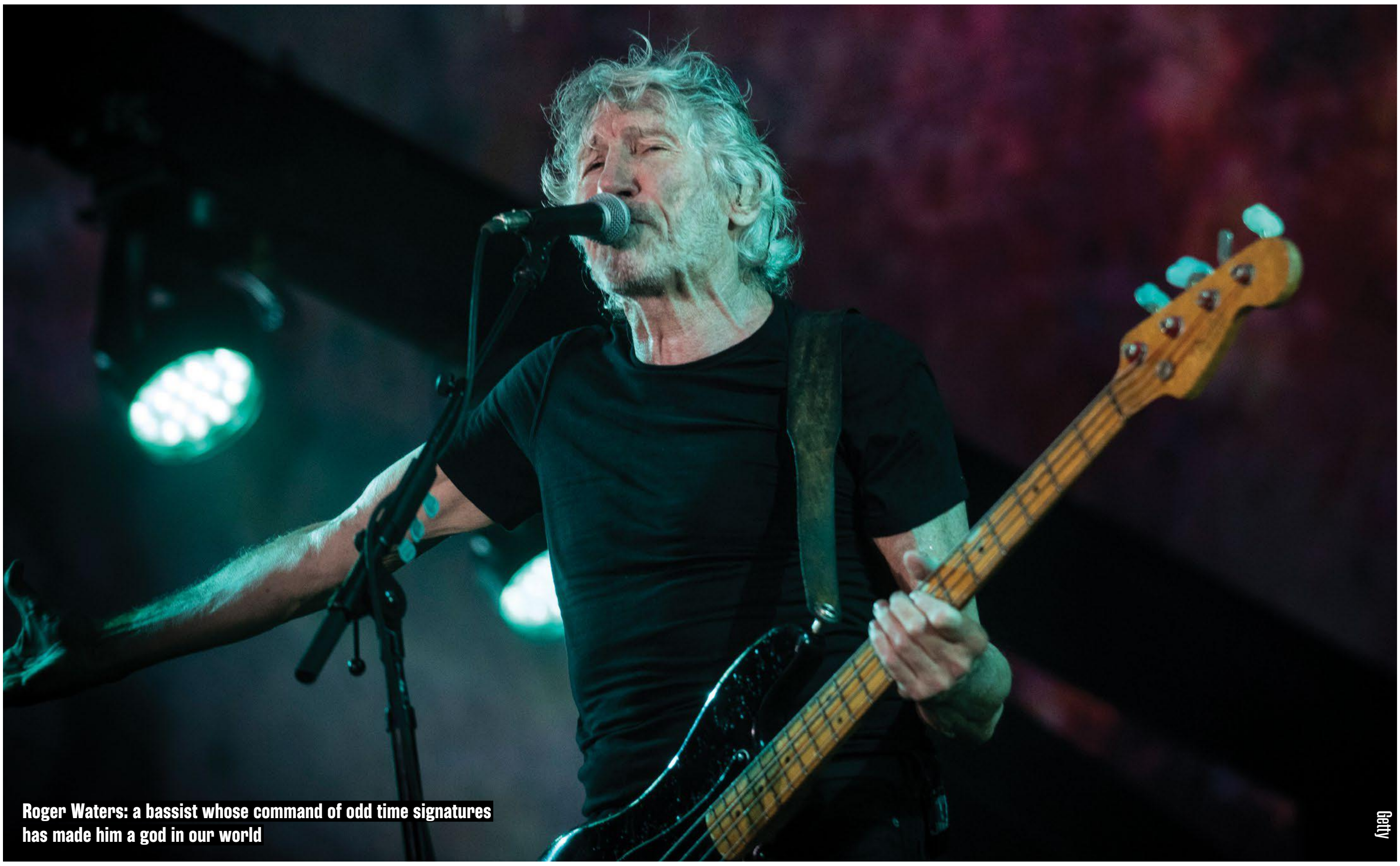
Intermediate Tutorial

Shake off the shackles of common time and waltz away to a world of new possibilties with Phil Mann

Welcome! Almost every contemporary recording we encounter on television or radio is composed entirely in 4/4 (also called 'common time'), meaning that the underlying pulse of the music can be felt evenly in subdivisions of four. It's when this platform is removed that we begin to perceive a time signature as 'odd'. This issue we're going to begin studying this strange, off-kilter world.

Although 4/4 time signatures dominate the soundtrack to our lives, there are some examples of 'odd time' in our day-to-day consumption of contemporary music. The most common non-4/4 time signatures that we come across on a regular basis are 2/4, sometimes referred to as 'marching time', and 3/4, the time signature of waltzes. It's this last time signature that we'll explore this month.

> "ALTHOUGH 4/4 TIME SIGNATURES DOMINATE THE SOUNDTRACK TO OUR LIVES, THERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF 'ODD TIME' IN OUR DAY-TO-DAY CONSUMPTION OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC"

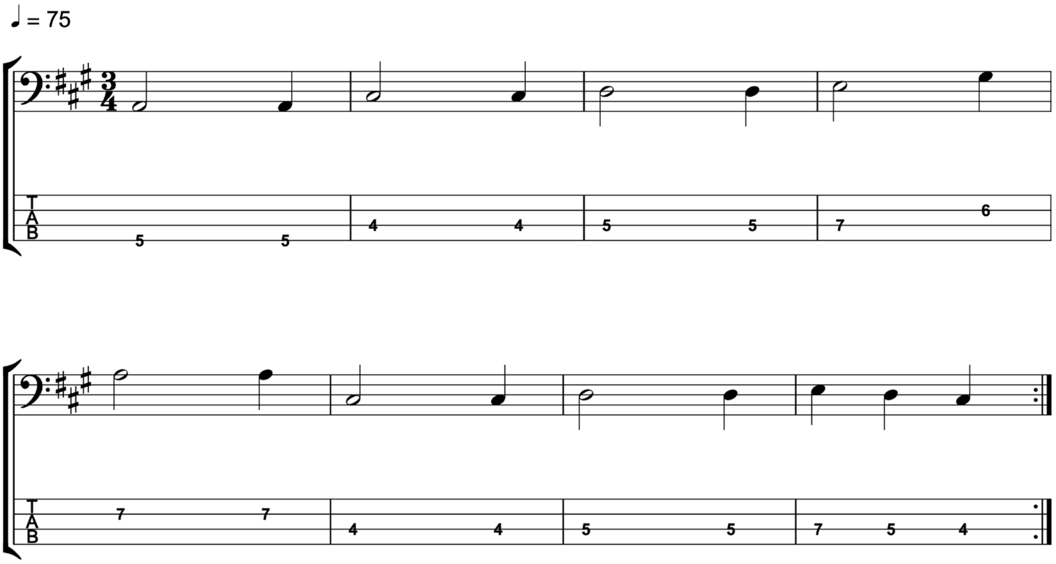


Roger Waters: a bassist whose command of odd time signatures has made him a god in our world

Getty

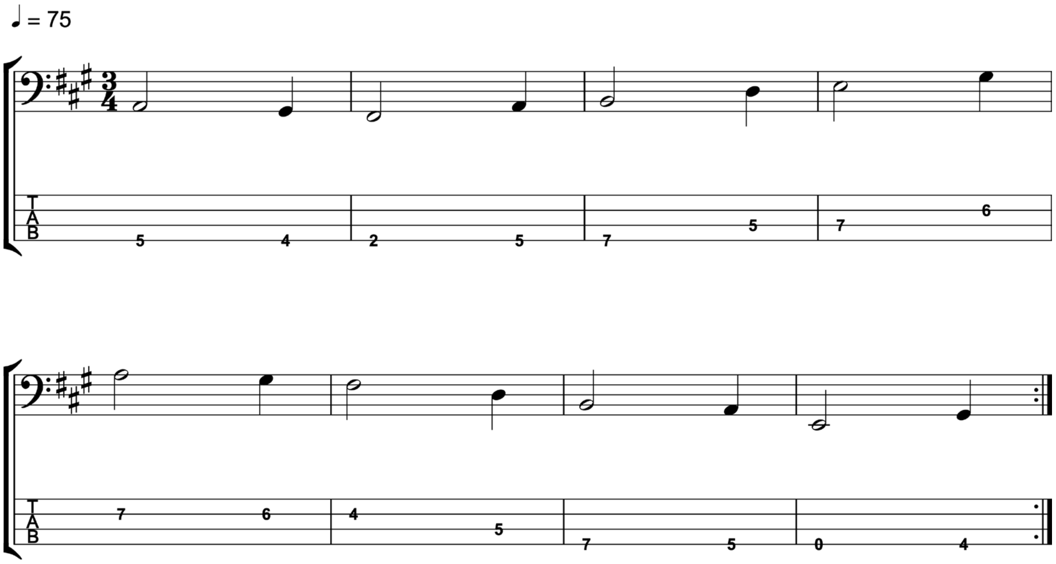
Example 1

To start with we'll stick to a relatively conventional I-III-IV-V chord progression while we get acquainted with the swaying sensation traditionally associated with 3/4 time signatures. It's this motion, created by the absence of a fourth beat, that underlies the choreography associated with waltz dance steps. Once you've mastered this study, attempt to perform the piece once more, but on this occasion swaying your body from left to right on the first beat of each measure. This will encourage that 3/4 swaying sensation we've mentioned… just remember that you're not quite Fred Astaire quite yet!



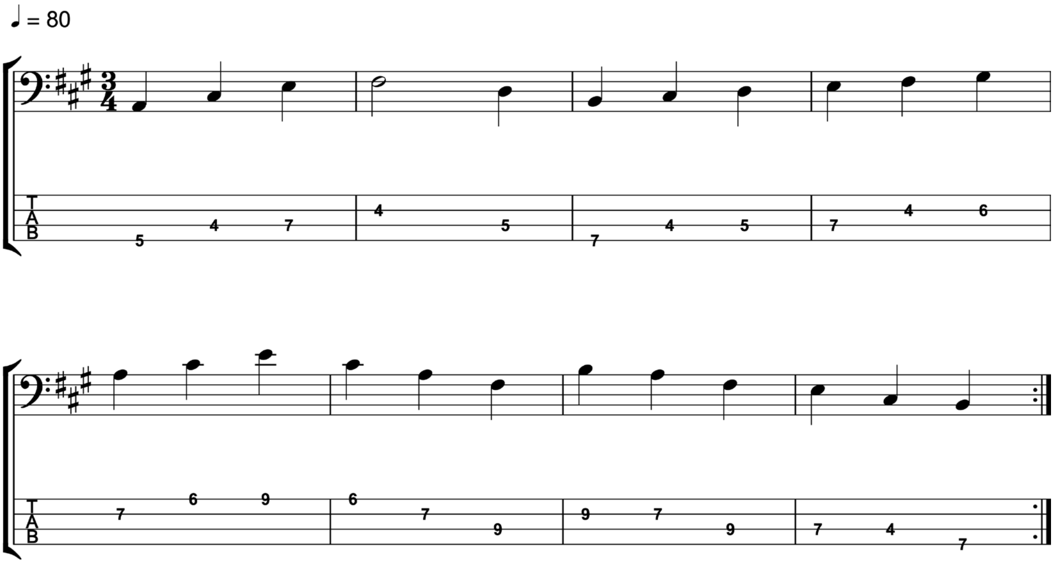
Example 2

Continuing to reinforce the feel of the 3/4 time signature, Example 2 uses a I-VI-II-V chord progression. Once again, a great deal of emphasis has been given to the first and third beats of each measure to induce the aforementioned swaying sensation. However, on this occasion, try to be sensitive to the presence of diatonic passing notes, as these pitches will help maintain a smooth passage between chords.



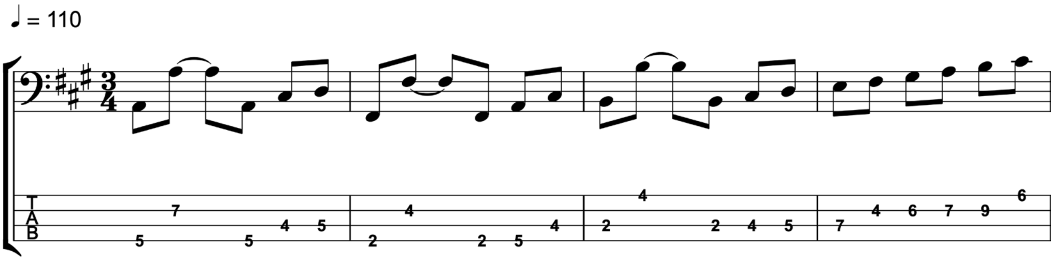
Example 3

This example continues to use the I-VI-II-V chord progression from the preceding study, but now we find ourselves delivering more diatonic information in the form of a walking bass-line. Add a little emphasis to beats one and three to produce an effect similar to the swing feel you can give to common time by emphasising the backbeats.



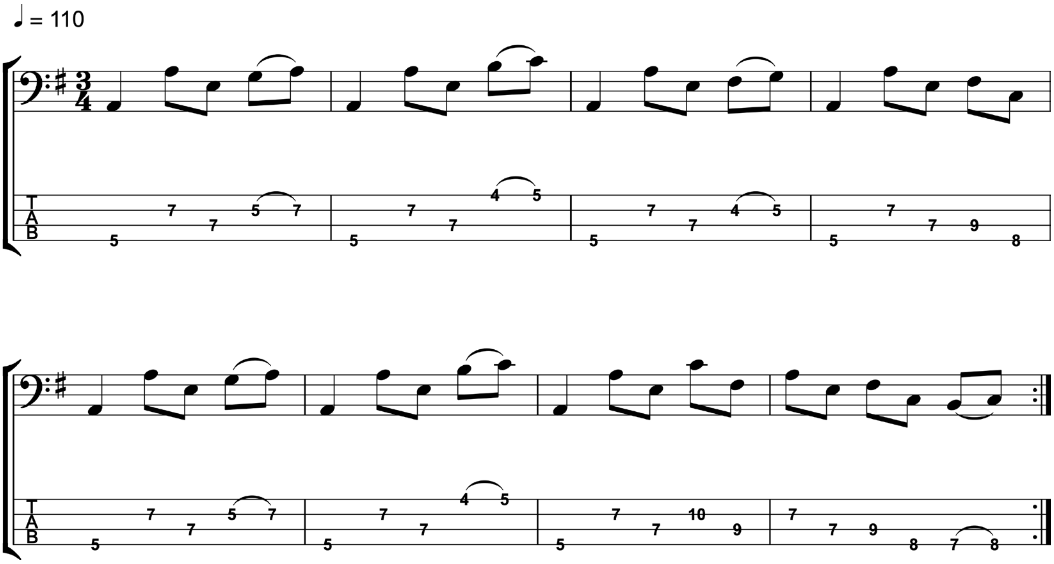
Example 4

Now that we've laid the theoretical foundations and became acquainted with 3/4, it's time to develop our abilities by adding some rhythmic variation. Although it uses an identical chord progression to the last exercise, the approach to the chords in Example 4 is more syncopated, with the second eighth note of most measures being tied to the third. This motif is repeated on numerous occasions, so efficiency is imperative; don't cut your notes too short through the tied sections, or rush the pitches on beat three of the measure.



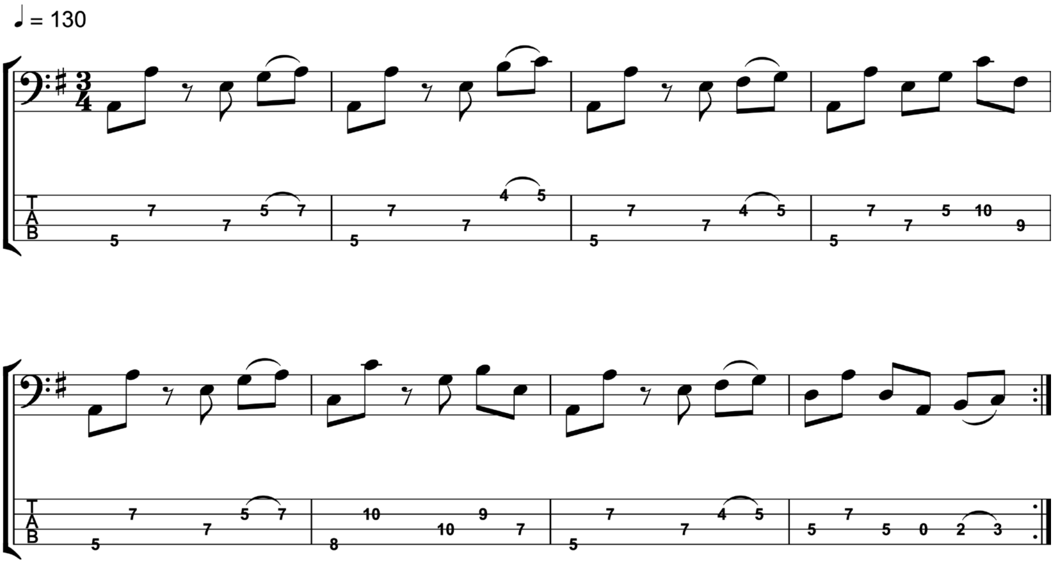
Example 5

The Dorian mode has an attribute that differentiates it from other minor structures: where most minor scales feature a b6 interval, the Dorian mode replaces this with a major 6th. This provides a naturally occurring approach note to the b7 interval, which is usually absent in traditional minor structures. We see these intervallic relationships in bar three of this example, where an ascending slur couples the pitches.



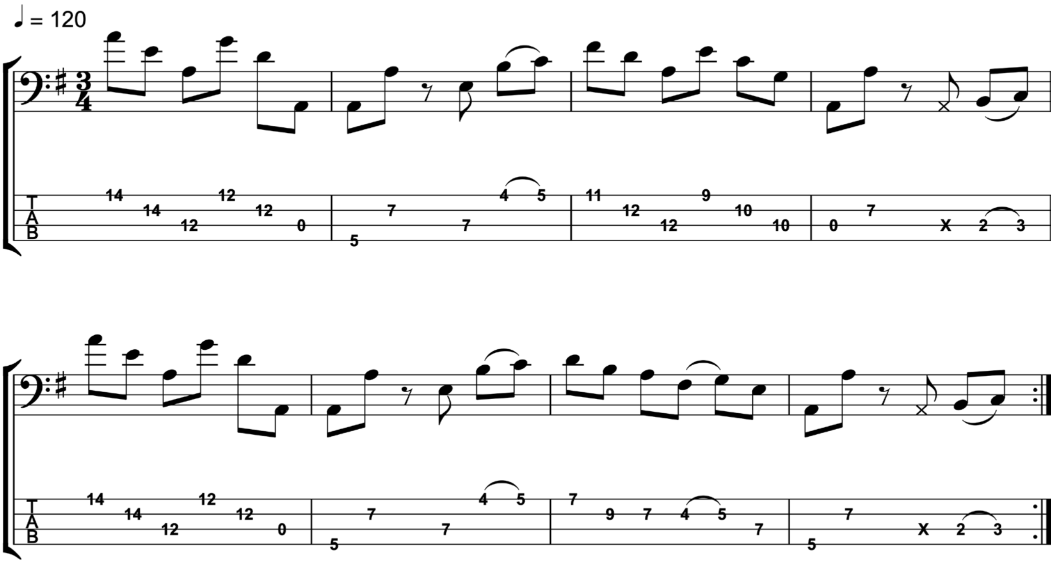
Example 6

A tritone is two pitches that are three whole steps apart. You first encountered this structure in the last example, and there's another one on the last beat of bar four in Example 6. Tritones can be quite sonically dissonant, which is why they're popular in heavy metal (and were unpopular among medieval churchgoers!). Once you've mastered them individually, Examples 5 and 6 can be combined to produce a single 16-bar figure. Start at the slower tempo and build up to 130.



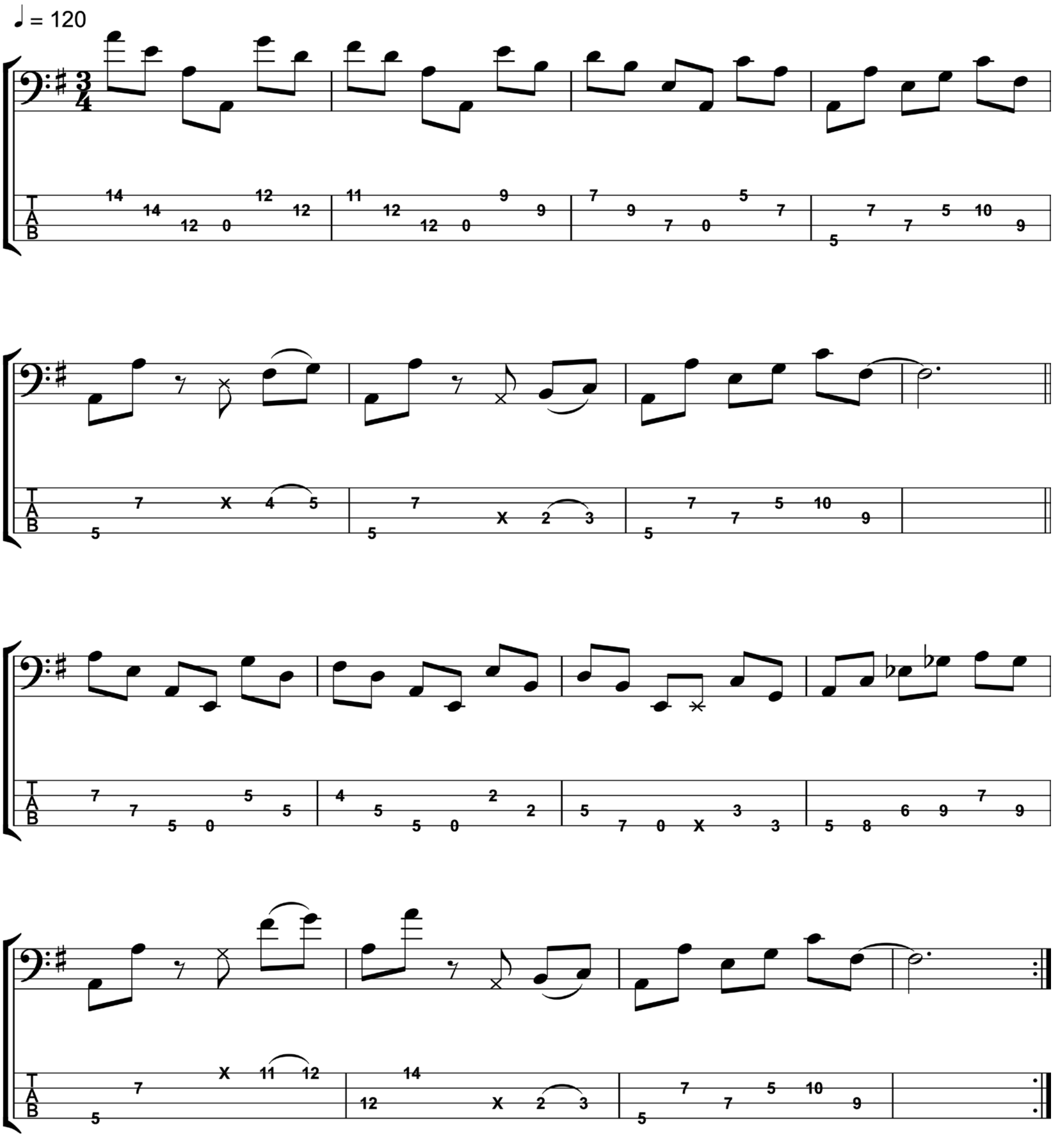
Example 7

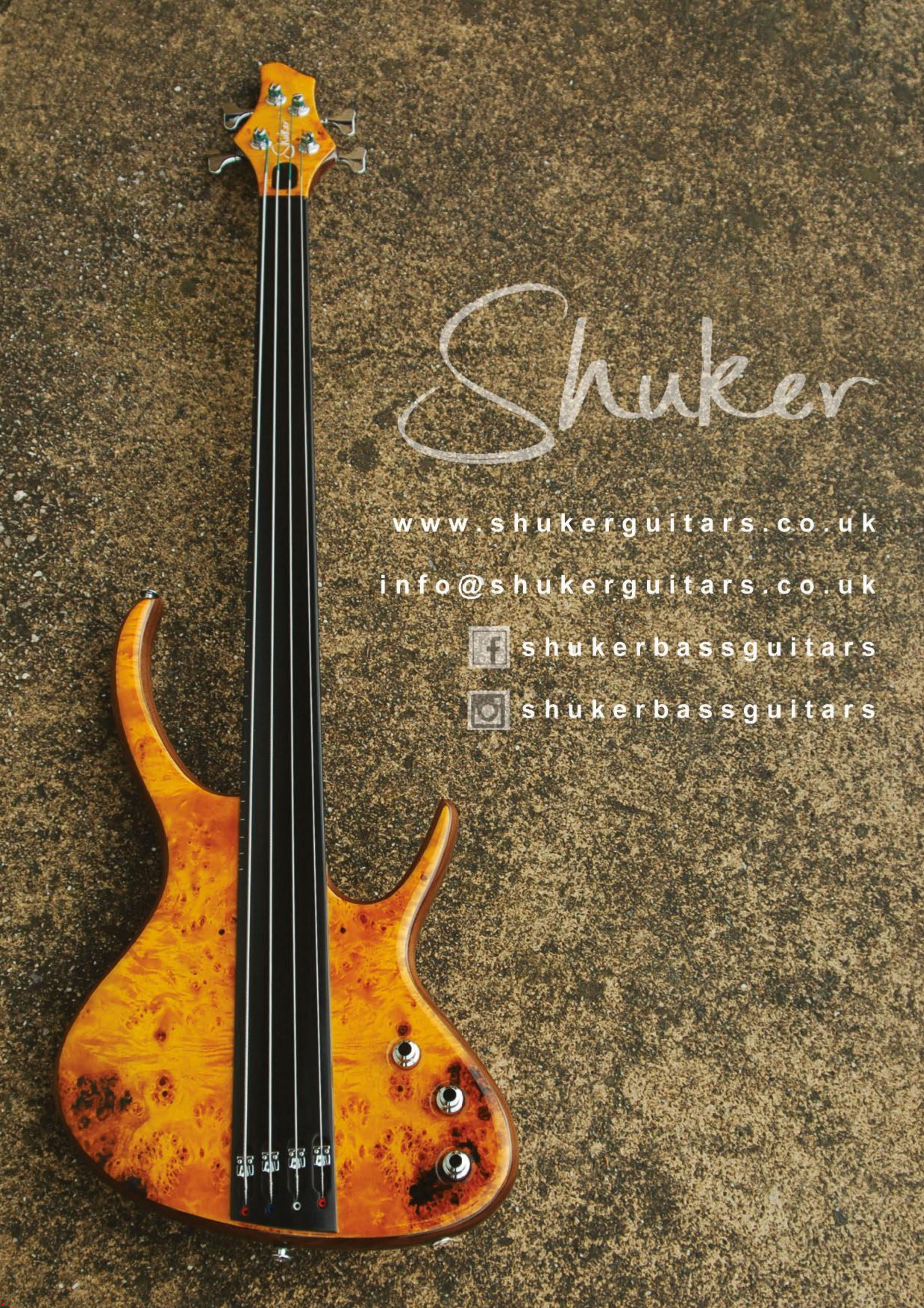
This month's penultimate study sends us up to the upper register of the bass. Use a one-finger-per-fret approach on the opening bar, while being careful not to roll off the fret of the initial pitch and choke the note. When ascending to the dusty end of the fingerboard you'll discover that the distances between frets are far narrower, so keep your eyes peeled!



Example 8

The ability to link different points within a composition using ostinato is an essential skill when working to create an effective groove. This can be achieved easily by simply playing one principal phrase at two different stages of a composition – perhaps once at the beginning, and then once again later on. You can see this methodology at work in this month's final example, where the opening sequence of notes reoccurs in a lower octave beginning at the ninth bar. Have fun with this one; I'll see you next time.

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STUART CLAYTON

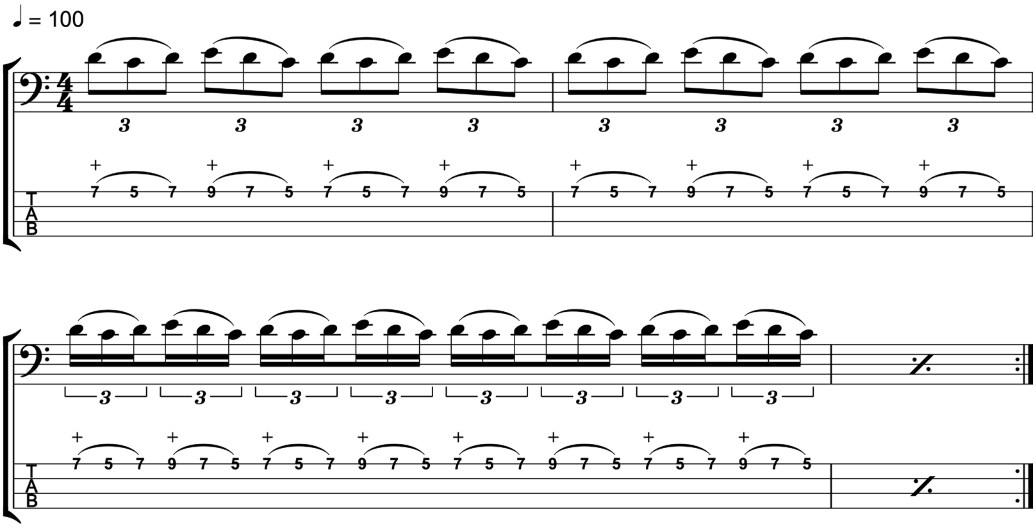
Advanced Tutorial

Are you in it for the trill? Then stick with Stuart Clayton as he takes his tapping lessons to the next level

Hello again, and welcome back to my series covering the tapping technique. In our last issue we focused on linear tapping, the single-string form of tapping that is often favoured by guitarists, as well as bassists such as Billy Sheehan, Stuart Hamm and Victor Wooten. We've covered the importance of basing such lines around chord tones or other appropriate melodic material, and in this month's instalment we're going to be taking the idea a step further and using the technique to play lines that move across the strings.

At the end of last month's instalment, we looked at performing a rapid-fire trill by combining tapped notes, pull-offs and hammer-ons. In this column, we're going to pick up where we left off and begin embellishing this idea.

Example 1



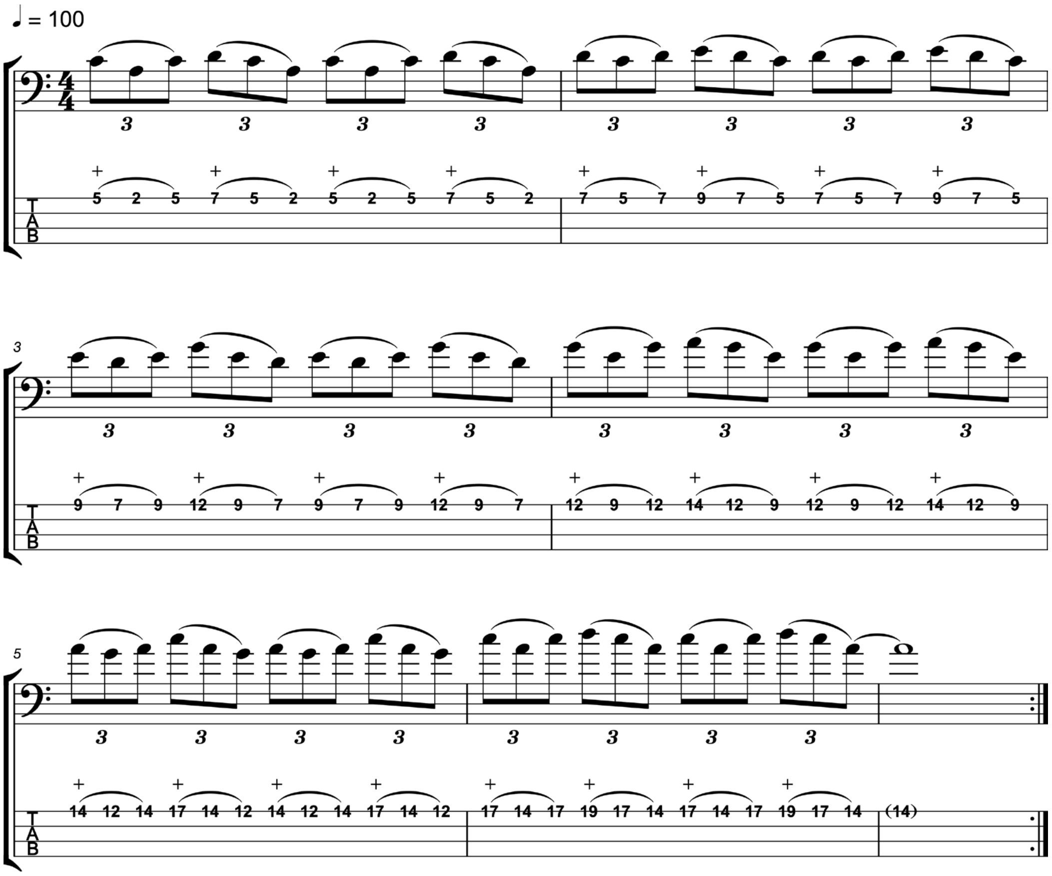
The rapid-fire trill example that we looked at last time can easily be expanded upon to include more notes. In this example, a repeating two-beat triplet figure is used. As before, the lowest note in the sequence – in this case C at the fifth fret of the G string – should be fretted by the first finger of the fretting hand before you start. The picking hand then taps the D, pulls off to sound the C, then the third finger of the fretting hand taps the D again.

This triplet is then followed by a second, in which an E is tapped with the picking hand, then pulled off to sound the D, and then pulled off again to the C. When this sequence of triplets is repeated, the picking hand will be moving rapidly back and forth between tapping the D and the E. This exercise is easier to perform than it is to explain, and hopefully you'll find it easier than it sounds. You'll notice that in the second half of the exercise the line has been doubled up to be played as sixteenth note triplets – and although this is double the speed of the first two bars, you should find it relatively easy to do.

> "ALTHOUGH THESE EXERCISES ARE LIKELY TO PROVE CHALLENGING TO BEGIN WITH, THEY WILL BE INVALUABLE FOR HELPING YOU DEVELOP YOUR LINEAR TAPPING TECHNIQUE"

Example 2

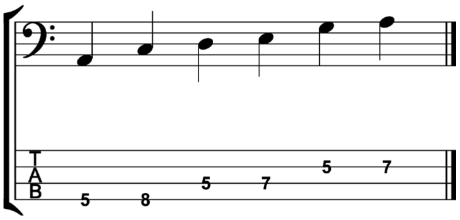
Let's take this concept and apply it to a longer line. This example expands on the previous one. We'll now be using the technique to play this idea as an ascending line that progresses up through the A minor pentatonic scale. Note that for the sake of space I have not notated this as sixteenth note triplets as well, but you should certainly practise it that way once you're comfortable with the notes and position shifts.



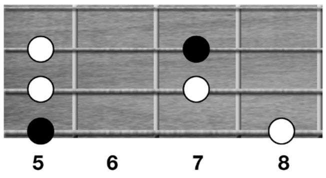
The A Minor Pentatonic Scale

As you can probably imagine, many tapping parts are played on multiple strings rather than just on a single string. With that in mind, we're now going to look at some examples that will help us to develop the ability to cross strings comfortably with the technique. In order to do this using some sensible melodic material, we're going to be focusing our efforts within the A minor pentatonic scale.

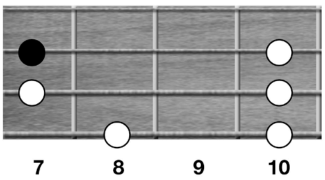
The A minor pentatonic scale is a five-note scale created by removing the second and sixth scale degrees from the A natural minor scale (B and F). Note that in the example below, the scale has been shown with the octave A at the end.



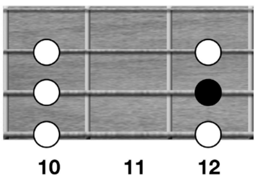
Box Shape 1



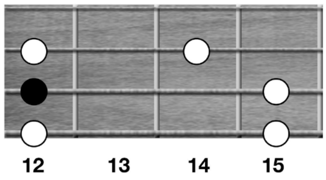
Box Shape 2



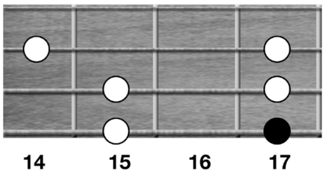
Box Shape 3



Box Shape 4



Box Shape 5

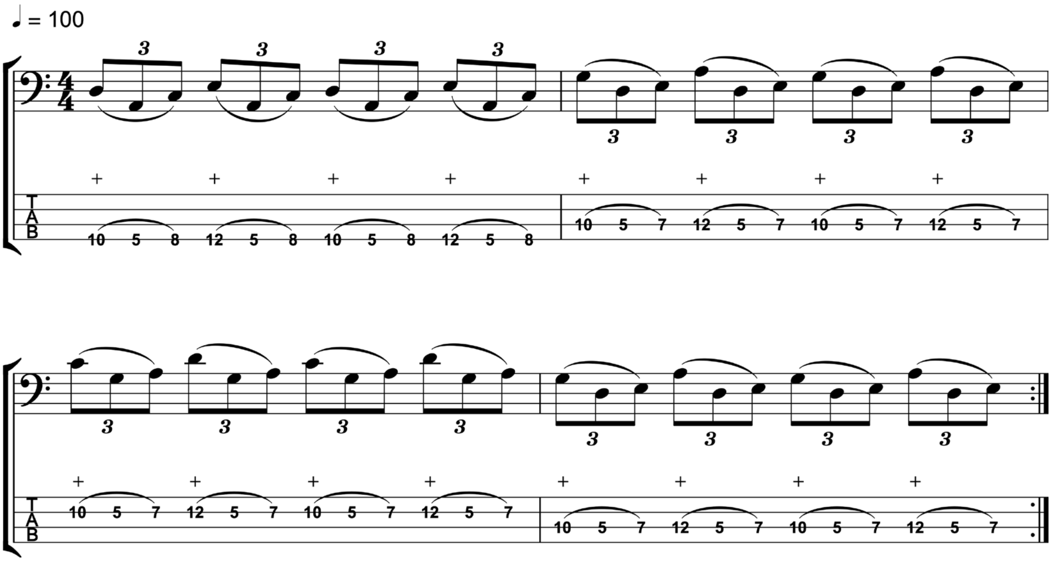


Guitarists usually learn the pentatonic scale as a series of box shapes, each of which begins from a different note of the scale. These can be thought of as modes of the pentatonic scale, if you prefer. Although I am not a big advocate of using box shapes on the bass, in this instance they prove quite useful. The five box shapes are shown above (root notes are shown with black dots).

In the next group of examples, we will use the linear tapping technique to play through pentatonic lines. The logic behind these exercises is simple: each hand will be tapping notes from a different pentatonic box shape. Although they are likely to prove challenging to begin with, they will be invaluable for helping you develop your linear tapping technique into something that you can play across all four strings.

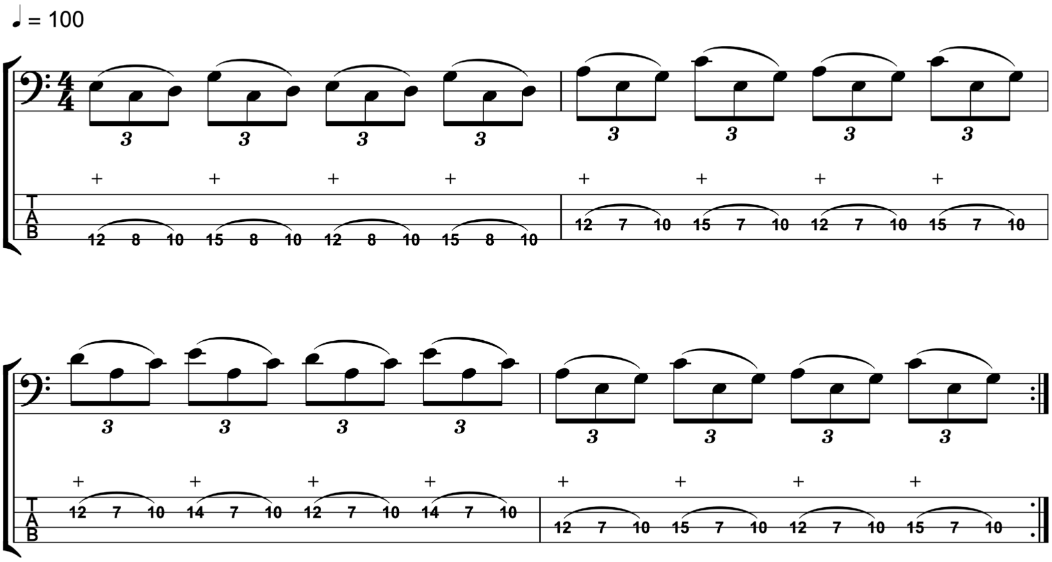
Example 3

Here the fretting hand uses notes from the first pentatonic box shape, while the picking hand taps notes from the third.



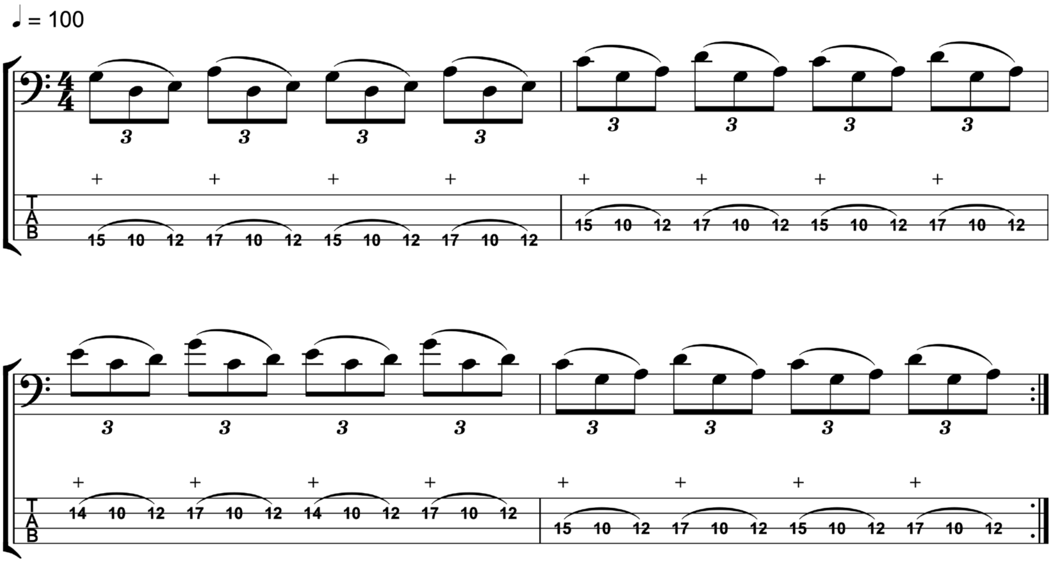
Example 4

This example uses the second box shape for the fretting hand, while the picking hand moves around the fourth.



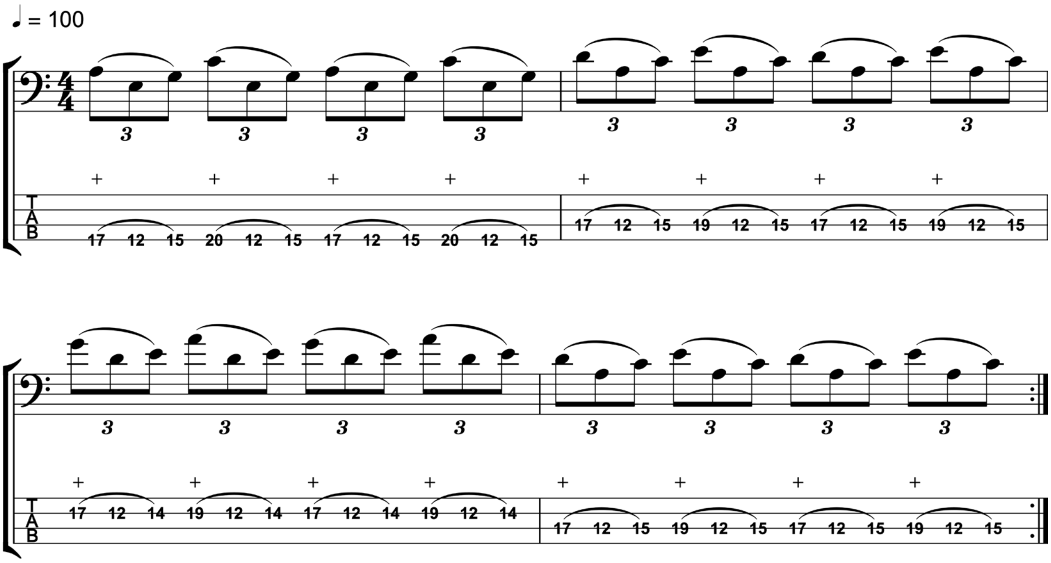
Example 5

Heading further up the fretboard, this example uses the third shape for the fretting hand and the fifth for the picking hand.



Example 6

Finally, this example uses the first shape in the picking hand and the fourth in the fretting hand.

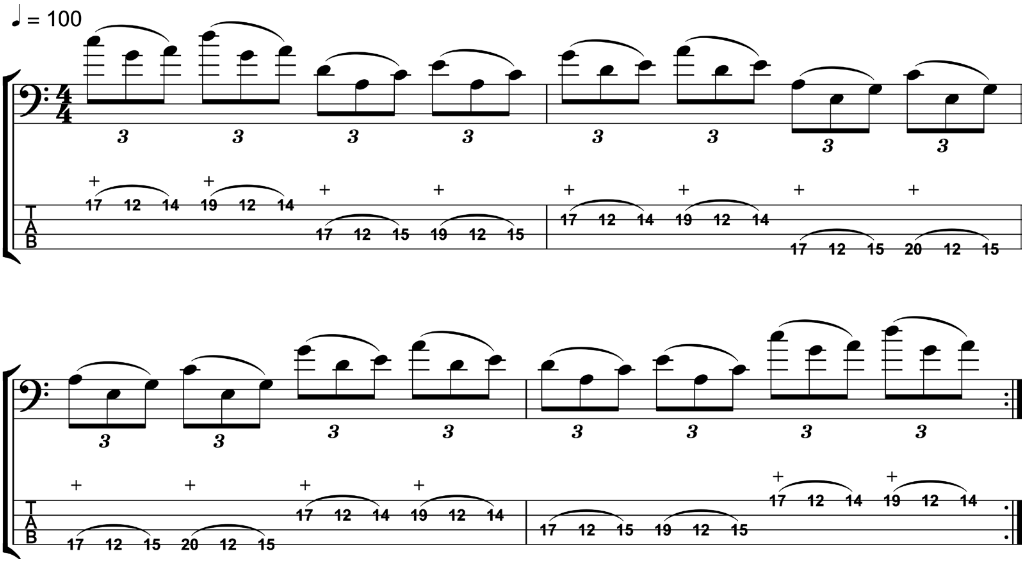


String Skipping

In each of the previous four exercises we have been using the string crossing technique, where we always move to an adjacent string. It's important when learning this technique to be able to jump to a different string, one that isn't adjacent to the string you're currently on. To do so is known as string skipping, and it is this that we will now focus on.

Example 7

Another pentatonic box shape exercise, but this time, rather than tapping across the strings in a strict low-to-high sequence, an alternative pattern is used: G string to A string, then D string to E string. This idea is then reversed. Each string sequence only lasts for half a bar before changing, so there is quite a lot of information to digest here! You should now explore other string crossing possibilities using the pentatonic scale.

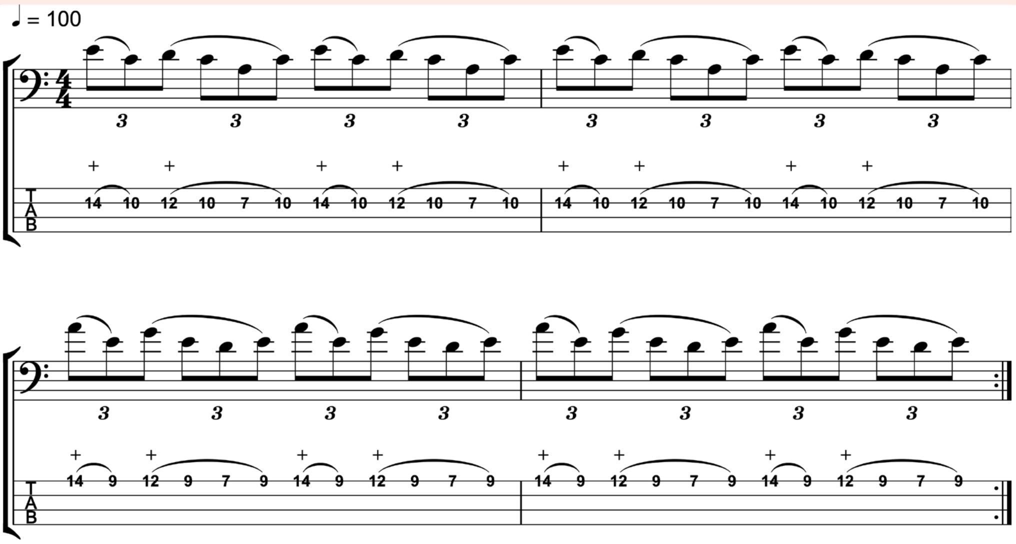


Further Variations

Keep working on applying linear tapping technique across different strings; we'll be looking at some variations on these ideas in next month's column.

Example 8

This line features two taps with the picking hand in quick succession: an E is tapped on the D string and pulled off to sound a C fretted by the fourth finger of the fretting hand. Although it's fingered as two notes followed by four, the line is still played in a triplet rhythm, which repeats for two bars before the same sequence occurs on the G-string. Next month we'll be looking at further variations on the linear tapping technique. As ever, I can be reached through the magazine if you have questions, so feel free to get in touch. Until next time, have fun with this great technique.



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LOW END OF LOVE

Joe Shooman signs off each issue by celebrating an iconic bass guitar. This month: the unique Ampeg Scroll Bass

Instruments don't get much more iconic in our world than the beautiful Ampeg Scroll Bass. With its intriguing and beautiful blend of classical music-style headstock and F-holes through the body, it is instantly recognisable, visually and sonically.

Master luthier Bruce Johnson of the Extremely Strange Musical Instrument Company is one of the world's leading experts on the Ampeg. "The Scroll Bass really does sound distinctly different than a [standard] Fender electric bass, for technical reasons," he explains. "Ampeg was working on new design ideas in the 1960s that wouldn't be seen in the electric bass world for another 25 years."

Key was the purchase of the company Zorko in 1958, including their small, electric upright bass which involved into Ampeg's (SSB) Baby Bass. Johnson says that this demanded innovations in pickup technology. "The Zorko and Baby Bass used a bridge similar to an upright bass," he says. "Each pickup was a round rod magnet surrounded by a coil of fine wire. On top of each coil was a thin steel disc in a frame, like a small drum head. The bridge foot pressed on the centre of the disc. Plucking the string caused the bridge to rock and bounce, which flexed the two discs, creating an electrical signal in the two magnetic coils. This brought out the attack curve of the notes, the pulse and warble and bloom, that are so much of the character of an upright bass sound."

In 1965 Dennis Kager designed a horizontal electric, plus the Ampeg Mystery Pickup, an example of what Johnson calls a 'Mechanical Percussive Pickup'. Chicago bassist Gordon Patriarca of Chicago, who has appeared on around 40 albums and gigged about 5000 times in his long career, says: "I did not like the sound. Each one I owned was modded with different pickups and a modern bridge. As my concept of ideal tone has evolved over the years from brighter to much darker, I would probably be amenable to the sound of the Mystery Pickup more now. I do love the necks, though. They are like a slightly flatter 60s P-bass neck."

Kager was also responsible for a drastic redesign of the body, explains Johnson. "The big F-holes all the way through the body aren't just a visual design element," he says. "They're a functional part of structurally weakening the body. This flexing of the body added warmth and richness to the midrange and extra harmonics in the background. These days we call this technique 'chambering', but Ampeg was doing it 50 years ago."

The AEB-1 and its fretless variant, the AUB-1, were manufactured between 1966 and '68; in total there were only around 2000 Scroll Basses of various kinds produced including the 'Devil' bass. Johnson is now the leading manufacturer, with his AMB-2 custom-made 'sequel' version in high demand, albeit in a rather niche market.

"They're complicated, expensive and risky to build," he says. "Most builders today are focused on a different type of instrument for modern bass playing with lots of fast notes, a super low action and a bright, pingy sound. The Scroll Bass is designed for an older style of playing, with smooth flatwounds, and slower, longer notes, where you can hear the warm overtones and the percussive attack curve. It's the bass sound you'd hear in a 1940s swing band or jazz combo." Sounds like a refreshing change to us…

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